MEDITATIONS WITHOUT METHOD

W. D. STRAPPINI, S.J.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE INWARD GOSPEL

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LONDON, NEW YORK, BOMBAY, CALCUTTA AND
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MEDITATIONS
WITHOUT METHOD

CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING
THE CHARACTER & TEACHING
OF CHRIST · ARRANGED AS AN IN-
FORMAL THREE DAYS' RETREAT

By
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"The Inward Gospel"

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SECOND EDITION

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK
BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS
1919

3449

Nihil obstat:
J. N. STRASSMAIER, S.J.,
Censor deputatus.

Imprimatur:
EDM. CAN. SURMONT,
Vic. gen.
Westmonasterii die 20 *Febr.* 1913.

Made in Great Britain

"And Simon Peter answered him: LORD, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have known that thou art the CHRIST the SON of GOD." John vi. 69-70.

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NOTE

THIS being a book for meditation, it is not intended to be merely read through, but to be thought over. Consequently here many topics are but lightly indicated, and, as a rule, thoughts are not followed out to final conclusions, this work being left mainly to the user of the book.

Also, being a book of devotion, its aim is not the latest speculative criticism. Accepting the New Testament as revelation, some thoughts are suggested as springing naturally to the mind of a Catholic when thinking over the words and actions recorded by the Evangelists. Action is a more universally understood language than any dialect. An endeavour has been made to show how CHRIST'S teaching emerges from his actions ; how teaching by action supports and amplifies his teaching by word of mouth.

The study of the Man himself is often neglected by those who study certain aspects of his career, and emphasize only the submerged philosophy they profess to discover below the depths covered by simple phraseology. Even supposing its existence (which I deny), such submerged philosophy would be of no use to mankind generally as balm for human woes.

With the aid of the teaching and enduring Church, all can study and understand the Man CHRIST, who was JESUS the Word made Flesh.

W. D. S.

FIRST DAY

Meditation I. The Word made Flesh.
Meditation II. His Mother Mary.
Meditation III. The Works of CHRIST.
Instruction I. Confessions of Devotion.

SECOND DAY

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THIRD DAY

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Meditation IX. Gennesaret and Peace.
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MEDITATION I
INTRODUCTORY
THE WORD MADE FLESH

"THE Word was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us." This is the primary truth of the Christian Faith. All Christianity is built on this foundation. All other Christian dogmas presuppose this one, and flow naturally out from it. The Word made Flesh is at once the simplest and yet quite the most profoundly inexplicable of all the revealed truths of the New Testament. Here we begin at the beginning: Faith sets this fact before us, and until we have mastered this fact (in achieving which Faith masters us), we are quite outside real Christianity.

2. In the fullness of time the Word was made Flesh. Not at the earliest period, but at the fitting period. Mankind had to pass through many stages before time became ripe for the Incarnation. The human race has a long history emerging from the mists of legendary, but yet positive, early knowledge of mankind. As soon as we see any thing, we see men groping their way through the dimly-lit pathways of Nature towards some knowledge of GOD. Man felt his own insignificance and his own dependence on forces beyond his own physical range too keenly, not to let the speculations of his mind

trend towards the finding of this half apparent, half hidden power. The might of this power shone through the veil of natural occurrences which overhangs man's pathway from the cradle to the tomb. How could man help wanting to know with clear satisfying knowledge this ever present, ever elusive Presence? However shadowy in outline, the power itself was proclaimed by its manifestation of intelligence and by its overruling mastery. It could, when it would. There grew up in the heart awe, and reverence, and the instinct to worship and dimly to love. So strong an instinct to worship, that worship was squandered on any unusual object that attracted man's attention and appealed to any of the strong emotions embedded in man's complex nature. Without much surprise we find men loving and fearing and worshipping the wrong things. But with all this wrong application of his capacity for worship, the capacity itself was God-given. In his own time and way there would be developed God's plan for the complete satisfying of this implanted human instinct.

To appease this craving three things are needed:

A. Knowledge.

B. Love.

C. Possession.

A. Knowledge. We know the Word as he

was made flesh. How do we know our fellow man? We get to know a man's parentage, childhood, occupation, character, certain events in his life which manifest to us what manner of man he is. All these elements are at hand to help us to know the Word made Flesh.

3. We know His Mother: a woman calm, thoughtful, pure, one who had consideration for others: "they have no wine," she said on a memorable occasion, and these are the words of one whose maternal solicitude was not narrowly confined to her own domestic circle. She was a mother who stood bravely by the side of her son in the hour of his national degradation and death. All that a perfect mother could be, she was. As a child He was subject to her, and she exercised her maternal rights gently but firmly.

We know His occupation: He was a worker in wood, a carpenter, an occupation involving varieties of handiwork; He worked with His hands, and ate his bread in the sweat of His brow, "If a man will not work," says St Paul, "neither let him eat, . . ." a drastic ordinance. He worked and deserved His daily bread; He was worthy of His hire, and in creditable, if inconspicuous toil, His unnoticed childhood ran its innocent course up to manhood. From His quiet adolescence He emerges a thoughtful man, patient, hardy, with no relaxed muscles, able to endure hunger and thirst, calmly brave in the face of danger, self-possessed, without

arrogance before the magnates of His people, never aggressive, never weak, ever kindly, ever the perfect master of Himself in deed and in word: "If any man offend not in word," says St James, "the same is a perfect man." He alone of all mankind stands this test.

4. We know that He had a wonderful charm of manner. His personality attracted not one type of man or woman, but many. Who were His friends? Peter, the rough, impetuous fisherman; John, the gentle and loving; Levi, the publican and socially banned; Joseph, the wealthy stranger from Arimathea; Nicodemus, well born and conscientious, but timid; Zacchaeus, the rich moneylender; the condemned thief on the cross. What a variety of types and social levels! But with all their differences they were at one in this: they all loved Him.

And so it was with the women with whom He was brought into contact in the course of His journeyings and ministrations. They followed Him, ministering to Him, attentive and useful, but unobtrusive. Such various types too. Mary, the Magdalen; the Woman of Samaria; energetic Martha; the devoted mother of the sons of Zebedee; all, whether good and gentle or stained with a sinful past, they all responded to the attractive sympathy which drew them to better things and gave a new depth and meaning to their lives; uplifting them from a position of inferiority to one of equality and even eminence, as we read

of the apostles, "they were persevering in prayer with the women and Mary." His personal attitude towards women initiated a movement designed for the betterment of mankind through the gentle influence of woman, which has not yet reached its full development.

5. And His words. "Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh." What sort of heart is revealed by His Words? What was the effect of His words on those who heard them? "Never," they said, "did man speak as this man speaks!" Wonderful words, the very echo of them reaching us across many intervening centuries still stir the heart and prompt to nobler life. There were no words spoken for mere effect. They sought out and brought strength and comfort to the sorrowful and the downcast; the mourner was more than consoled. "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted . . . blessed are the poor in spirit," those who have cut themselves adrift from the artificial wants of pampered ideals. Blessed are those who now suffer persecution, not for their own delinquencies indeed, but for justice's sake: all words that penetrate to the heart, even of those who are left out of account, those who live in the backwaters of life, who wearily plod the by-ways and seek, unnoticed, shelter behind the hedgerows, and lie themselves down wearily to rest in the ditches. Who cares for them? He does, and to such as these

His words are soothingly addressed. How new, how always new these words of His, their freshness never lost by repetition from age to age; His words gave life to ideas, ideas you may clothe in any language spoken by man, and they will ring true in any heart sympathetic enough to receive them. No wonder they said one to the other, "This man speaks with power and not like the Scribes and Pharisees." The Scribes appealed to higher authority, and quoted in support of their decisions their great law-giver, Moses; but this man quotes His own authority. "It was said to you of old" (a well-known formula) "but *I* say to you." The authority of old is not denied, but here speaks an equal authority, and one which enlarges and perfects what had been left purposely incomplete. It was acknowledged that it was GOD, the GOD of Israel, who had spoken "of old," so now this speaker tacitly claims divinity. Yet they felt it was not arrogance, but power. "This man speaks with power." Nor could they reasonably doubt His power, for it was manifested in so many ways, and always for the immediate benefit of others.

6. GOD'S plan was to send his own SON, the second Person of the Trinity, the Word, and so, in due time, the Word was made Flesh and came and dwelt amongst us. He dwelt in our midst to satisfy our craving for knowledge and worship. This craving exists in mankind even if not in any given man, just as mankind has the

power of eyesight, even though this power be wanting in any given individual.

7. Power He had, and all knew it. He had but to say to the stones at His feet that they should become bread, and bread they would have become. Yet He Himself hungered while He fed five thousand with bread in the wilderness. He Himself thirsted on the cross, but He would not let the marriage feast be troubled for want of wine, and the wine He gave was exceeding good. These were but minor evidences of His innate power. At His word the wind that stormed and lashed into foam the waters of the lake sank into hushed tranquillity, and rested in a great calm. Nature felt His power, and instantly obeyed His tranquil voice. To the leper who prayed for health He said "I will, be thou clean," and he was cleansed even as the sound of the words died away. He took the dead maiden by the hand: "She sleeps," He said, and they laughed Him to scorn as one too simple, one who knew not sleep from death. He took her hand, and His touch infused life; His hand gave the maid back, glowing with health and life, to her amazed parents.

8. He did more than restore health and life. Those who stood about and watched His every action could see that His word was healing and even life-giving. But His power went beyond the range of man's bodily vision. He forgave sins also. The man sick of the palsy

(Mat. ix. 2), when brought into His presence, was surprised to hear Him say, "be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee." It is easy for anyone to say majestically, thy sins are forgiven thee, . . . and who is to know what happens? Such words suggest scepticism in the minds of those who chance to hear them. His power laid bare to Him the unspoken question in their minds, and He meets their unspoken words. "Why think you evil in your hearts? You think it easy for Me, or for anyone to say, thy sins are forgiven thee. For me it is as easy as to say, as I say now, take up thy bed and walk." And taking up his bed the man walked to his house, a living proof of this man's power to forgive sins.

9. In our written records we find this man had power and used it, as no man before or since.

Power impresses, it awes, it puts a gulf between its possessor and our ordinary selves. Yet it hardly appeals to the heart. So very much depends upon the way this power is used. To have a giant's power is good, but what tyranny to use it as a giant! But His power He uniformly used to attract confidence and win love.

Love is a much abused word, and often stands for sheer sentimentality, something emotional on the surface, but without depth or endurance. To be real, love must have both depth and endurance. For real help in life,

the gossamer fabric of which sentiment is woven brilliant with all the changing hues of the soap-bubble, and as unsubstantial, gives no solid support. Sentiment effervesces noisily, appears to be about to do things, but speedily dissolves into misty nothing; now, without outward display, love does solid work. We are told that nothing so inclines us to love as the knowledge that we are loved. Yet we must have external evidence of the hidden internal charity. However concealed, real love is too active not to betray itself. How has CHRIST shown love to us? What has He done?

10. He loved first. This is certain. This is the argument of St John. "Let us therefore love GOD because GOD first hath loved us." (1 John iv. 19.) He knew us while we were but dim possibilities, beings which could come into existence at some period should He so will; beings who were already present to His all-seeing eye. He saw us as possible, and He did will that one day we should have an actual place in this visible world. We should not be living this day had it not been for His foreknowledge and co-operation. Yet He was, and is, always free in giving the gift of life. To us, He chose to give it together with all that the gift entails. His gift is the air we breathe, the sun that warms, the food that nourishes, the eye that sees, the brain that thinks, the heart that loves, the companionship that brings out the many sympathies latent in human nature.

They are all His gift, for we certainly did not make them all for ourselves nor, similarly, did our parents give to themselves the qualities they, too, found that they mysteriously possessed.

Having received so much, should we not in our turn give something?

11. This is a question which is too individual to be answered generally and in the abstract. Each one must give his own answer, framed according to his circumstances, endowments, and opportunities. What we all can have, and should consequently aim at possessing is, readiness of will and promptness of response to any sufficiently clear invitation. In general terms we should be ready, we should be anxious to give real love to one who has shown such evident marks of love towards ourselves. Where there is real love there follows an ardent longing to possess what is deeply loved. An instinct in our nature impels us to want the object which is loved. If we love money, we want money; if we love fame, we want fame; and so in like manner with respect to whatever we hold desirable.

12. The knowledge of God, out of which there also emerges love of God, brings an inextinguishable longing to possess the God so loved. The possession of God up to our capacity is Heaven; the loss of God definite and final is Hell. "Give me but Thy love and I am rich indeed!" is the cry in which the saints have

endeavoured to clothe with adequate expression the deep emotion of an enlightened heart.

But possession must obviously be various. My eye can see the peach ripening in the summer sunlight, and my ready hand can grasp and take it. My hand can grasp what is material. My mind can grasp what is immaterial. When memory takes me back to the days of my childhood, I can realize my mother's love, but my hand will not help me here, and yet it is no less a real possession than the fruit I hold in my hand. So we come to realize that what is subject to our senses, with our senses we can grasp and possess, what is spiritual we can indeed possess, yet in a way which is also spiritual. Circumstanced as human beings are now, we are not only wholly spirits nor yet wholly material; so that our composite nature realizes best only such objectives which can be reached by our various faculties acting in combination.

13. The knowledge that God is a Spirit is knowledge that in a way satisfies our intellect, but it does not satisfy our heart. We still need something which at the same time is satisfying both to intellect and heart. This need was met when "the Word was made Flesh." How many mysterious problems are there here for our intelligent speculation which underlie this familiar phrase? "And dwelt amongst us." How many more incidents for our hearts to treasure lie equally beneath this completing phrase?

14. The Word made Flesh is the response to thoughtful man's deep desire to see and to know and to love God. For many centuries this desire was but partially satisfied. Now we have the means to obtain the fullest satisfaction which is compatible with human nature. "Amen I say to you, many Prophets and just men have desired to see the things that you see, and have not seen them, and to hear the things that you hear and have not heard them." (Matt. xiii. 17.) When our intelligence is lit up by this new light it understands, and then is strangely satisfied, it feels nourished by its intellectual food and elated at its grasp of what it now understands. Were we simple, disembodied intelligences, purely intellectual, and not clothed with flesh, this knowledge would be all sufficient. But as we are actually, a well fed intellect may often leave the heart strangely hungry and unsatisfied.

15. Herein our need is legitimate, and in His wisdom God has met this need. Met it, that is, as far as is compatible with our position as human creatures as yet passing through a stage of probation. Our want is not simply to know him, we want to have him, we want Him to be with us. So He promises that He will be with us. "Immanuel," that is, "God with us." "And His name shall be called Immanuel." (Isai. vii. 14.)

He was to be with us, but how? He was to be with us in a manner foreshadowed by the

manna of the desert. "Your fathers did eat manna in the desert and are dead. But I am the Bread of Life. I am the living Bread. The Bread that I will give is My Flesh. Except you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you shall have no life in you." A mysterious promise when made, but elucidated when in fulfilment of this very promise, the night before He suffered, He, "taking bread, gave thanks and brake, and gave to them saying, This is My Body." This is the Christian tradition, handed down in the words of St Paul. (1 Cor. xi. 24.) "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread, and giving thanks, broke and said, Take ye and eat, this is My Body."

How perfect is this Communion of the Creator with His creature! Only divine wisdom and divine power could so combine the incompatible, so weld together Spirit and Flesh, and give the creature such perfect, even if evanescent, possession of its Lord!

MEDITATION II

HIS MOTHER MARY

THE life of Our LORD is an unending study for mankind. Different as may be their motives, friend and foe alike find in this life various, but all absorbing, interests. No matter how divergent their point of view, all can see that He was the founder of a religion still living and energizing and moulding the higher races of mankind. The slowly passing centuries which have elapsed since He lived and taught, naturally have brought developments, and such developments. None of the earlier followers of CHRIST could have dreamed that the representative of their crucified Master would one day sit where Cæsar sat, and from the imperial city of Augustus, would rule a larger world, but with power for the healing, not for the destruction, of the nations.

The Church, which is the spiritual kingdom of CHRIST, after well nigh two thousand years, continues to be a living power. It is contradicted, as it was prophesied that it would be contradicted, but its contradiction is proof of its vitality; you don't contradict the non-existent. Cæsar, with all human resources at his command, failed to keep an empire; CHRIST, with no human aids to speak of, has built up,

and maintains, an empire which looms large in the sight of men even to this day.

Here, then, in CHRIST is a personality which cannot be ignored; He has left His mark too deeply on the history of mankind. All that pertains to such a character needs must be full of human interest. The interest in a man's life begins with his parentage. Apart as He was from ordinary men in so many ways, CHRIST is apart also in his parentage. Had GOD so willed, His parentage might have been other than it was, but Christian feeling never could wish it to have been different to what it was actually. The Virgin birth responds to deep Christian instincts, and we should not care to read in the Gospels other words than those familiar words of Gabriel, recorded for us by St Luke. "The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore also the Holy that shall be born of thee shall be called the SON of GOD." This message forms a fitting preface to His career, but notice: His career waits till it wins the thoughtful and free acquiescence of a woman. Mary does not answer at once with impulsive gratitude at the magnitude of the favour shown her; but considers, and asks: "How shall this be done?" Well might she ask, for a new, a quite unique occurrence was waiting for her acceptance. Not that she doubted, for in that case the penalty of doubt which fell on Zachary would certainly in some measure have rested also on

her. It is good for us to know that until the Angel sent from God, as he evidently was, had sufficiently made known the design of God, Mary withheld her consent, when her conscience and reason were at rest, then, but not till then, she gave her submissive answer, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

2. With these words of hers not only Mary, but Christian womanhood enters on a new phase. A servant may indeed be a servant, but in his service he ranks with the rank of his master. For ages woman had suffered in the service of mankind. Woman was still to suffer and to serve, as indeed we all suffer and serve —some in one way, some in another—but henceforth her service is elevated, for she is the handmaiden chosen to carry out a special service for the Most High. When God gives His own work to be done by one of His creatures, at the same time He clothes that creature with a dignity commensurate with the service demanded. Is not a Prophet held in honour because he is a Prophet? or an Apostle because he is an Apostle? There were many who could serve as Prophets or Apostles, but Mary's service was unique, and so closely personal that it could never be shared by another. And Mary's service may also symbolize a high service which womankind is henceforth called upon to undertake, "the weak things being chosen to confound the strong."

A great deal of the work of life necessarily

performed by women is supremely altruistic. It never can be anything else than a burden which cannot be laid on other shoulders. Like other work, it can be done grudgingly, inefficiently, or in perfection. The labour which should be one of love, may be resented as a tyranny. The love of self, self ease, may blind some women to that greater love which overflows, as it is meant to do, only by the bursting of the barriers of self-centred interest. By deliberately setting the welfare of another life before her own, woman rises to a height of unselfish pre-eminence which gives a nobility and even heroism to her ordinary career. High as is the moral worth of such a life, yet it is not to be forced on the unwilling: even Mary's consent was to be free, not forced.

Having the power of choice, the Word chose Mary. He would have Mary for His mother, but He would not force Himself upon her as He had the power, and even the right, to do. Only with her free consent, only with the knowledge of the consequences of her acceptance would He give the honours, the joys, and the deep sorrows which her acceptance would necessarily entail upon her.

"The angel was sent from God." So often have we heard these words that our ears may have become dulled to their significance. The Jewish woman occupied a position of some inferiority, yet her ideal as a helpmate to man was not lost sight of. The names of Sarah,

Rebecca, Rachel, of Miriam and Deborah, of Ruth and Abigail, kept alive the memory of womanly virtues and of the respect due to wife and mother.

But the messengers of God went only to Prophets and Kings, and if Deborah was a prophetess she was also the wife of Lappidoth and a true mother in Israel and not like Mary, a maiden of tender years. He who waited till His messenger had received the quietly considered assent of His own honoured mother, was always remarkable for His courteous treatment of women: nor was he courteous only to those whose social position demanded courtesy. He never failed in grave courtesy even to those beyond the pale, such as the woman of Samaria, or the woman in the city, who was known as a sinner. It was not that He was tolerant of moral evil, but He knew the heart. He knew how willing a spirit often dwelt beneath the oppression of human weakness. He would not crush the wounded spirit, but gently gave help to assist it to rise from ruins brought about by its own inherent weaknesses. The great Physician, as He says of Himself, is solicitous for the sick and weakly, not for the hale and strong.

3. When He asked His mother's acceptance of her great destiny, He asked it precisely that He might now begin his quest of the sheep that were lost, so that afterwards, on his own shoulders, he might carry the wanderers back to His fold.

Mary must have been habitually thoughtful. When the unexpected message fell suddenly on her ears, she was not dismayed nor did she lose her presence of mind. She "thought within herself what manner of salutation this should be." Taken by surprise, on the spur of the moment the real self comes promptly to the surface. One who habitually yielded to each sudden impulse, one who was easily dazzled by appeals to an easily excited imagination, would never have had the ready mastery of self which is needed to think quietly at such a sudden and hardly credible surprise. We witness a trait in her character all the more remarkable for the fewness of her years. So young, but already so thoughtful. How many women ruin their own lives and bring lasting sorrow to many about them by want of thought! It is so necessary to train the young from their earliest years to meet and to hold in check the surging impulses which come clamouring blindly for instant appeasement: passions that are deaf as well as blind to all save their own satisfaction! How well trained was this maiden; for the moment dazed at the bright vision and the momentous message of the Angel, but who still was mistress of herself enough to "think within herself" about the import of the wonderful salutation.

Though Mary is necessarily unique . . . as CHRIST Himself was unique . . . still Mary is also a type, as also CHRIST was a type. Both

raised on high, both really unapproachable in their several spheres, still both are ideals to aim at, ideals which elevate all who make the effort to aim, though none may do more than approximate to the goal. New ideals are to radiate from Mary, for women are to have new duties together with new ideals all emanating from Mary. The plans of God are leisurely in their realization. The amelioration of mankind is progressing, if by imperceptible accretions, ever ebbing and flowing like a slowly rising tide, which seems to retire as much as it advances, and yet does make progress. In many ways this progress was, and is, to be brought about by the instrumentality of women.

Since the day when Mary gave her well-considered answer woman has entered on a new phase, one still yet developing. What a chapter in the history of mankind is furnished by what Christianity has done for women, and what women have done for Christianity. Women in the home, like Makrina, the sister of St Basil, who to her orphaned brothers was "not only sister, but father, mother, guardian and tutor all in one." If St John Chrysostom was a saint, did he not owe his education to his mother, Anthusa? Who can think of Augustin without thought of Monica?

Not only families, but what do not nations owe to Christian women? Did not the Empress Pulcheria, even in her youth, bring peace and prosperity to the Eastern empire? How many

names of women are linked with the countries to which they brought civilization and Christianity? St Margaret of Scotland, St Elizabeth of Hungary, her descendant Elizabeth of Portugal, Blanche of Castile, Joan of Arc . . . a list too long to enumerate of women whose names are familiar as household words, whose lives have made the distinction of Christian women a title of more than earthly splendour. And is it not evident that if many have written their names large in the memory of men, there must be many more unknown to recorded history whose names are inscribed in golden characters in the Book of Life. Now what they did, and what they were, these Christian women in large measure owed to Mary, Our Lady, the model according to which they aimed at fashioning their lives.

4. When choosing a thoughtful maiden, CHRIST chose a thoughtful mother. For, as life goes on, character does not alter out of recognition; character matures, deepens, develops with opportunity. In his dealings with man, GOD chooses to use man's co-operation, utilizing the natural qualities already existing. If we had records we should see the growth of Mary's child as He grew before her eyes in grace with GOD and men; no incident of His childhood was lost on her who noted everything, trivial perhaps to outsiders, but full of meaning to a mother's heart. Not without reason are we reminded in the Gospel that

Mary treasured all these incidents "pondering over them in her heart." Where is the mother who will not understand and sympathize with Mary in this? Not that the divine Child needed a mother's care, but *we* needed the lesson.

And what of the Child Himself? For eighteen long years of childhood and adolescence He is content that our knowledge of Him shall be summed up in the simple phrase, "he was subject to them," and as a natural consequence of this filial subjection to wise and thoughtful parents he apparently "grew in wisdom and age and grace with GOD and men."

The veil which hides that secluded life is lifted for one brief glimpse, then falls again. Could the home life of Nazareth be other than a heaven on earth? Could anything break in upon the tranquil harmony of that perfect home? But there is to be no heaven on earth, not even for Mary. Despite its seeming harshness this is a most necessary truth to be assimilated by each and every Christian. So CHRIST Himself had to teach the lesson. To enforce the lesson He had to make use of those who were deservedly the nearest and dearest to Himself, those in whose lives not the shadow even of personal demerit could be traced. The lesson would be lost, if their anguish of heart could seem to be only the just retribution for personal shortcomings.

We are told of the sorrow of three days crowded with keenest anxiety ; all the more keen

from its mystery. Was it possible! The Child was lost! For such a mother as Mary there could be but one cause of sorrow, any mischance to her Child. Why could not such a mother be spared a grief so sudden and so heartrending? Because there are no motherly hearts into which grief will not have to enter, and what sympathy can be found in the human heart which has not itself known human sorrow? Not for herself, but for our instruction Mary had to suffer.

"We have sought Thee sorrowing," were her words of greeting to the Child when found. Such a sorrowful seeking. Such a glad finding. But if a mother has parental sorrows and joys, a mother has parental rights and duties also. There is more than one lesson set before us in the history of these three days. No human child has the right to plunge his parents into unexpected sorrow deepened by mystery. A human mother's rights are her duties also ; she cannot neglect the one without at the same time neglecting the other. It is true, there could be no negligence, no neglect of duty in Mary. Neither the dark cloud of anguish, nor the sunshine of a new found joy, could dim Mary's clear perception of her maternal duty. The mystery must be explained, if not to her, at least to others who had not her special knowledge. Her right must be vindicated, but her words are calm, measured, and rational as well as authoritative. And it is

Mary, not Joseph, who says, "Son, why hast Thou done so to us?"

The answer is ready and conclusive, "Did *you* not know that I must be about My *Father's business*?" This we may expand somewhat in this manner. Did you not know that one thing only could induce Me to cause one moment's anxiety? That one thing is, My Heavenly Father's business; was it not for *that* alone that I became your son? Nothing less, nothing but the one object of my coming into this world would have made me even seem neglectful of My mother's feelings or of My mother's rights. In the long succeeding years spent at Nazareth we are told that His mother thought over these things deeply, thought over them in her heart. And, thinking in her heart, she must have come to know a truth which her son intended to teach by means of the sorrow He had to inflict on His innocent mother. Parents indeed have rights, and He who gave the command that parents should be honoured is evidently the last to be suspected of doing violence to His own commandment. But He had to show that there is another duty which we all owe to a Fatherhood supremely above earthly parentage. Even before the duty we owe to father and mother there comes ever first and foremost our primary duty to that Father who is in Heaven, from whom all fatherhood is named. Our first obedience then is due to Him, and in any conflict of duties,

when our Heavenly Father's business really requires it, we may not hesitate to cause unavoidable pain even to the mother who cradled us in her arms, even to such a mother as Our Lady herself. GOD, simply because He is GOD, has the first claim to our service, and when He sees good to press His claim, then all other service falls into the background. There are parents who dwell too exclusively on their parental rights, forgetful that children also have rights; they forget the paramount rights of our Heavenly FATHER. This is a lesson for all to ponder, this lesson given by the most perfect of Sons in the presence of the most perfect of mothers, not for her enlightenment, but for ours. Hers was not the only mother's heart that was to be pierced by a sword of sorrow . . . not indeed for the sake of sorrow, but for the high purpose that out of many hearts thoughts might be revealed.

6. The lifted veil drops again over the home at Nazareth. Years later it rises again at Cana of Galilee. We see enacted a drama in several episodes, where perverse attention is often directed to one episode to the total exclusion of others. Skilful and arbitrary picking and choosing in this way can easily suggest false impressions. Cana of Galilee will always loom large when we consider the few recorded incidents in the concurrent lives of Mary and her Son. For the "beginning of miracles" did JESUS at Cana, and did so entirely at His

mother's request. Only faulty scholarship and scanty knowledge of eastern manners could find any open discourtesy in the exclamation, "O woman; what is it to Me and thee, My hour is not yet come!" Even if the exclamation seemed to imply a refusal, hostile comment might be enlightened by the final result of the mother's appeal so simply expressed and not repeated. What happened? He who had never yet shown any outward manifestation of His inherent dominion over nature, did He refuse her request? Was not His mother who had lived with Him in the intimacy of home life for thirty years more likely to understand her own Son better than any twentieth century commentator? Let His mother be our commentator. How did she interpret His words? Did she retire silenced and confused into the background as if reproved? Nothing of the sort. She went quietly to the serving men and said to them simply, "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do it." That was all. CHRIST Himself did the rest. If His words are taken as implying refusal, that very refusal would only make His immediate compliance with His mother's request all the more remarkable. Apart from speculations, it stands recorded in the Gospel that the first miracle wrought by the Word Incarnate was wrought at His mother's simple suggestion. The HOLY SPIRIT in the Gospel has recorded for us the first result of Mary's intercession with her Son.

Mary's conduct at Cana may typify to us the rôle of woman. Though seemingly in the background she was promptly alive to the wants of those about her. They had no special claim upon her, such claims as come from family and kindred, her solicitudes for others overflowed beyond the limits of her own household. They were in need, and this constituted a sufficient claim on her. And quietly, unostentatiously, she takes effective means to meet the unexpected want. Mary's quick womanly intuition saw what had failed to attract any notice from the kindliest of the men who had followed her Son. Her womanly instinct quickly saw the fitting way for her to act. Without any outward demonstration of her kindly interest, she quietly uses her influence with her Son, a whispered word, and all was well, and having said her word, she retires and leaves the rest to Him. "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do it." This is her message. Would she not say the same to us in any emergency? Mary's message to mankind is, to listen to her Son and obey Him almost blindly; for we do not see how all will come right. We want wine, and we are told to draw water! Well, we can easily do that, and He, just as easily can do the rest. There must be much that we don't understand; but Mary had thought over Gabriel's words, "for with God there is nothing impossible." Is it without significance that while He Himself could have

at once come to the rescue of His hosts, yet He did not, till Mary, the typical woman, came, and in a womanly way made known the wants of others, and for her friends obtained all that her intercession suggested.

7. When a man is following the active life of a man, when he follows a career taxing all his energies, it is only at intervals that he will be found in the society of womankind. We should be surprised to find CHRIST Himself mainly in the company of women. It is only at certain definite points that the orbit of a woman's career intersects that of a man. But at these points we do expect her presence, if it be possible. The mother who survives her son gleans a sad consolation from the thought that it was her hand and not a stranger's that closed in death the eyes that turned their first look to her. Cut off in the full strength of early manhood, we are not surprised to read that "there stood by the cross of JESUS His mother."

It seems a simple and a natural thing to say, but think of the full meaning of her standing there! Not a painter's artistic conception of the scene, but the actuality. Think what it was to stand facing a hostile crowd, standing at the side of one execrated, one who was at the lowest depths, one who was the butt of a nation's hatred. The East has at no time been remarkable for the gentle conduct of excited mobs able and willing to express their hate

and vengeance upon a defaulter to his race, and his race's religion. "They that passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads . . . the soldiers also mocked Him. . . ." The rulers of the people looked on and scoffed at Him, "He saved others, let Him save Himself." All the crowd, loafers, sightseers, officials, and casual passers-by, Scribes and Pharisees, soldiers, criminals . . . all joined in the popular outburst . . . many hardly knowing why, but as mobs do, taking up parrot cries and shouting because others shouted. "Vah! thou who savest others, save Thyself!" All this Mary saw and heard, as she faced them all, standing by the side of her Son, helpless but faithful; till death put an end to the mob's unreasoning malignity. What think you of the character of her who stood on the hill of Calvary and endured all this? Certainly a mother's love will do much and endure much, but had ever mother such an ordeal as this! And there was nothing she could do to alleviate His suffering, she could not put a cup of water to His parched and blackened lips, or bathe His thorn-pierced brow. Words cannot convey all the anguish that filled that mother's heart during the hours she stood bravely enduring so much beside the crucified. Within our hearts we may dwell on such sorrows, but adequate description is beyond the reach even of reverent language.

8. But why should she, the stainless exception in all our sin-stained race, why should

she be doomed to undeserved suffering such as this? We may think out many answers to this difficult question. Her very sinlessness, her intimate proximity to Our Lord may emphasize the lesson, that this world is not Heaven, that through many tribulations we must all enter into the Kingdom of Heaven . . . and from this law there is no exception. In Mary's case her close relationship to the Sufferer on the cross only added to her heart-breaking grief. Strange indeed are God's ways, that He should reserve the deepest sorrows for those nearest and dearest to Himself! On Calvary we may measure pain by proximity to the Cross; those who stood farthest away endured least, but the dear ones who kept their sad station at the very foot of the Cross, they had to endure the most poignant anguish of all.

Nineteen centuries have dawned since Calvary was made an object lesson to us all, those who like may ignore the lesson; may deny its force; but the Crucifix is with us, and tells its own tale. The Crucifix still teaches that we must often reverse the judgments of the world. Do men follow the Crucified with more courage now than they did when Mary stood almost alone at the foot of the cross? Peter who had drawn his sword so valiantly in Gethsemane, now with the other disciples shrank willingly into the background, glad to escape notice. Besides St John, do we not read that it was

only a handful of women who stood faithfully by Mary? History has no brighter example of courage, fidelity, supreme disregard for the opinions of the mob, than is given us by these women whom we see on the hill top. All honour to them, and to those whom they represent.

9. For the multitudes who made up that crowd were very representative. And it is before this representative crowd that our LORD emphasizes a clause in His testament. There is here a deep underlying thought embodied in Christian doctrine which St Paul helps us to understand. He says to the Corinthians (1 Cor. x. 16, 17), "For we being many are one body: all partakers of one bread . . . and the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the LORD?" St Paul seems to intimate that this body has a transforming power; of course, within reasonable limits and with proper explanation, as the same apostle further explains in his letter to the Colossians (Col. i. 24), "I, Paul . . . fill up those sufferings of CHRIST in my flesh, for His body, which is the Church." The Church of CHRIST is the real, though mystical, body of CHRIST. "We being many, are one body in CHRIST." (Rom. xii. 5.) This is the same thought which Our LORD conveys Himself under the imagery of the vine and its branches: the vine which is diversified into leaves and branches and stem, and yet is one in the unity of its sharing one and the same life-giving sap. "Ye are one body,"

again says St Paul to the Corinthians (i. 12, 13), "for in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . now you are the Body of CHRIST and member of member." Of this mystical Body CHRIST is the Head. (Col. i. 18.) "And He is the head of the body, the Church. . . ."

This thought of His mystical body for which He had lived, and for which He was now suffering and dying, was evidently uppermost in His mind. The multitudes that were to form that body were present . . . more conspicuous to His inward eye than to His outlook at the moment, for His eye was growing dim with pain and exhaustion; He could see but one of His three years' disciples, St John. But in St John Christian thought has ever seen a representative; St John stood for all those for whom CHRIST once prayed in His comprehensive prayer. "And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who, through their word, shall believe in me." (Jo. xvii. 20.) We take St John, then, to stand for all, as the representative of all who were to constitute His mystical body. And all of us too were in His mind when He said to His mother, with His gaze fixed on St John, "Woman, behold thy son . . . after that He sayeth to the Disciple, Behold thy mother." (Jo. xix. 26, 27.) And from that hour St John (the representative of us all) took her to his own. From that moment we who unitedly form the mystical body, have a new relationship with that mother: in its

way, it is as real a relationship as we have with the head of our body. She belongs to us, so Christian feeling ever distinguishes her as "Our Lady." She is His dying gift to us. He chose her, made her perfect, the one woman in whom all good qualities are without flaw, with no shadow cast by very excess of light.

It seems that with Our Lady a new destiny, new functions are inaugurated for womankind. Functions which are essentially feminine, though to be exercised on a large scale, and not simply confined to the limited horizon of one domestic hearth. The mother's care for those dependent on her is enlarged by the number to be so dependent. The narrow interests of many women; often bounded by affection on one side and jealousy on the other; are to be broadened out. Already in many instances we see that they have been so broadened. Not always wisely, not always with unmixed benefit. But, let us remember, all beginnings are liable to be to some extent faulty. This is a characteristic which clings, as ivy winds about the oak, to most things that are human. Time and patience and the wise use of humbling mistakes will work order, even out of chaos.

10. CHRIST the Teacher would have some of His lessons made clear by the example set by His mother. He came for the regeneration of mankind, for the re-making of a world gone astray. The world of mankind can be made new only by the re-making of each individual

man. The wisest legislation ever devised by man can only aim at outside reform; leaving the heart and nature of man just as it was. But CHRIST aims at the renovation of the heart; the heart as symbolizing man's inmost nature. His reform begins at the centre and radiates to the circumference. He gives the little leaven hidden within which yet leavens the whole mass. Legislative enactments framed by governments scratch at the surface, but leave the depths untouched. Not so much new measures, as new men, are the object of CHRIST'S Gospel. "Unless ye be born again of water and of the HOLY SPIRIT," the doctrine which so mystified Nicodemus. The casting off of the old Adam, the assumption of the new; under these metaphors the same teaching is enforced. The renovation of man is the equivalent of a new birth: a new spirit born spiritually, spiritually fed, permeating, elevating, and, in a way, infusing a grace-given sharing of the Divinity, a new spiritual state well expressed in the prayer at Mass: "that we may share in the Divinity of Him who deigned to become a sharer in our humanity." (Prayer at the Lavabo.)

The renovation of man is not the renovation of his intellect alone. The ministry of CHRIST was not merely to appeal to intellect, an appeal almost necessarily confined to minds cultivated by leisurely study. Not to every man is given time and opportunity and ability

to study ; but every man has a heart, feelings and sympathies which lie deeper than arguments. There is the touch of Nature which makes the whole world kin. This touch is not a dry, intellectual polishing of the surface, but it reaches and fashions the man within. It re-makes the heart of man. Here it is that Mary helps. Simeon did not prophesy in vain, "and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother . . . behold, thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed." (Luc. ii. 34, 35.) CHRIST began His ministry of reconciliation by choosing her, having made her sinlessly perfect ; yet He will not spare her the sorrows which shadow the life of man ; but the sorrow-shadowed pathway in life is the only one which leads to the Kingdom of Heaven, even for one as immaculate as His mother.

MEDITATION III

THE WORKS OF CHRIST

"HE hath done all things well." This is said of one man only. Many men have occupied a large place in the estimation not only of their contemporaries, but in the balanced judgment of later ages. Many have deserved well of their fellow men as statesmen, as soldiers, as legislators, as philanthropists, as men supremely gifted as poets, painters, architects, explorers—in all the various positions in life in which men can rise to eminence and win the lasting gratitude of mankind.

But the searchlight of investigation has to be carefully adjusted. There are nooks and corners which must be generously left in obscurity. Light up the foreground as much as you like, but let the background be kindly shrouded by friendly night. Often enough the glamour of greatness is achieved by fixing the eye only on what can fitly meet the daylight, and discreetly averting it from much shabby environment.

2. But one man stands apart. His own nation by its foremost representatives accused Him before a Roman tribunal. No accusations could have had greater publicity. Yet before the crowd of His accusers, the Roman magistrate, willing as he was to propitiate those crowds, is forced by want of evidence to proclaim publicly

that no fault could be found in Him. Pilate said to the chief priests and to the accusing multitude, "I find no cause in this man." (Luc. xxiii. 4.) Now this Man was the Word made flesh who dwelt amongst us.

What came of His dwelling amongst us? What were His natural endowments for a great work, for lasting work for the betterment not of His own people only, but of mankind? And what is His permanent legacy, if any, left us as the outcome of His life work?

Socially, what was He? He was poor, not really indigent, as He had sufficient for the simple life He led as one earning His bread by daily toil in remote but beautiful Nazareth.

For the work He had to do, it was quite necessary that He should be without the ordinary human means by which such work as His might have been accomplished. Had He been rich or distinguished by high social position, the results achieved might not unreasonably have been put down to such wealth and social eminence. But He had no wealth. "The birds of the air have nests . . . but the Son of Man hath not whereon to lay His head." (Matt. viii. 20.) Nor had He social position. "Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary?" (Mar. vi. 3.) It is true that in those times a worker in wood was a craftsman ranking somewhat higher than amongst ourselves. Still, the position was humble. Nor had His education been one far above His apparent social position,

yet His enlightenment and teaching amazed the hearers who knew that he had never studied. "How came this man by all these things?" (Mar. vi. 2.) The opportunities of knowing the law, of hearing any professed teachers, open to Him were only those open to all others of His age and condition. All these others had equal opportunities, but *they* made no mark ; history would never hear of them, an indiscriminate crowd, known now only because of their envy and malice towards Him. "And they were scandalized in regard of Him." They were amongst the first to misinterpret and vilify Him, and their race has had imitators in every age down to and including our own.

3. He had an unpromising beginning for one who was to build a spiritual edifice on a spiritual quality, faith. This is the bond which for centuries has kept together the kingdom He founded so strangely. A kingdom utterly distinct from other kingdoms known to history. "My kingdom is not of this world." (Jo. xviii. 36.) Not of this world, yet permeating every kingdom since set up by mankind. We know His kingdom by the name of His Church. This is the work of Christ, the foundation and perpetuation of His Church.

4. The Church is CHRIST'S visible work. This is the work of His hands, and He has built so well that while all else that was contemporary with Himself has faded into dim historical recollections, His work has visibly endured, is

enduring, and will continue to endure. Yet how bitterly His work has been opposed! The years as they have lengthened out into centuries have witnessed the literal fulfilment of that prophecy of holy Simeon: "Behold, this Child is set ... for a sign that shall be contradicted." (Luc. ii. 34.) It is always being contradicted, yet the sign continues; the contradictions of many centuries have not dimmed the light which still shines steadily from that enduring sign.

5. The Church is the continual guardian of the faith which is to elevate, purify and strengthen mankind. Its office is to strengthen the spirit of man; without strength of spirit the strength of bone and muscle is but the strength of wax. It is the spirit which gives life, and, with life, strength. Through the Church this will be done, given a fair field for work. But it seldom meets with a fair field. Take our own souls. How often do they provide the battle-ground whereon the sign is contradicted? Who has not at odd times been startled by the discovery that his human nature is quite akin to that of the Roman poet who saw clearly enough what was best, yet weakly gave way to what was worst? Why have we stood upright? Why have we been strong when Horace and his compeers fell into the mire? Was it strength quite our own? No; it was because to us has been given the Faith of CHRIST, energizing our inmost being through the channels of the Seven Sacraments.

6. What the faith of CHRIST does for one man it is equally able to do for all men, for mankind; and where it fails, it fails through wilful opposition. The will of man is left free to choose as it may list. GOD can compel, but He does not want to be served by slave labour. He asks, where He could ordain. He stands at the door and knocks, when without effort He could burst through all barriers. He ever loves a willing giver, not one who yields with sulky dilatoriness when driven by dire necessity. Now each individual man is, in a way, an epitome of mankind. The hopes and the fears, the strong purpose and the weak fulfilment which is found in the individual, is but multiplied many times over in mankind. Do we wonder at the opposition which the practical faith of CHRIST has met with from so many? Recorded history has set down sins and schisms, blind prejudice and racial pride, pagan lust of earthly pleasure: all that has combined to oppose His teaching. Who has never heard some distant echo of this world-wide turmoil in his own human nature?

7. This is the world-wide turmoil which He came to still and to purify. His mission was not a mission exclusively to the just. Quite the contrary. He did not come, He says, using somewhat the language of oriental amplification, for the ninety-nine just, but rather for the one left out, who was not just. His object was not to shepherd the sheep already safely in the fold. His mission is a quest, a painstaking search

for the sheep that stray, and have become lost. His words are brief but emphatic: "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Nor did He limit Himself to fair words. The bewildered crowds asked His disciples: "Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?" To their minds, to sit at meat with men of no character was clearly the outside limit of condescension. It is true that the wealthy and the highly placed asked Him at times to their tables, but He was familiarly known as "the friend of publicans and sinners." He was not the friend of the rich Sadducee, or of the exclusive Pharisee. He mixed with the lowly, and with the men of no account, even with publicans. For the Jew, these men stood for petty tyranny and avaricious exactions, men who often enough abused their official position. The whole class was hateful to them, and a byword of reproach. Yet these were the men to whom He made known His new Gospel; to them He said: "Blessed are the clean of heart." These are the type of men whom he invites also to enter into His kingdom, which is not of this world. When we realize that it is to the publican and sinner, to the social outcast, to the human derelict that His message is addressed, then we realize that He brings a healing message to mankind. In every age, no doubt, there can be found some just, holy Simeons and Nathanaels in whom there is no guile and who need no repentance, and yet He says that one sinner

doing penance gives Him more joy than the ninety-nine just "who need not penance." (Luc. xv. 7.) But these Simeons and Nathanaels have never been in a majority ; would not most of us hesitate before confidently numbering ourselves in the slender ranks of the privileged class? But there is plenty of room for us all in the spacious company of "publicans and sinners."

8. It is out of this unpromising material that Christians can be and are made. For Christians are made, not born. "You were heretofore darkness, but now light in the LORD," says St Paul to his converts.

The work of CHRIST is to effect this change, the change from darkness to light. He is "the Light that is come into the world, light for the men who ever love darkness rather than light." (Jo. iii. 19.) This work of CHRIST begun with the labour of His own hands, is continued throughout the ages till the end of time by the instrumentality of His Church. "Behold, I send you as lambs among wolves . . . going therefore teach ye all nations . . . he that heareth you heareth Me . . . My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me. . . . He that is of GOD heareth the words of GOD." CHRIST'S work is not so much a work of mere enlightenment, it is not only an illumination of the intellect, but it is something more: it is the reconciliation of wayward and sin-stained man with his injured FATHER who is in Heaven. The work of CHRIST

is not the solution of recondite physical problems whose solutions may be found by steady and persevering study and experiment. No. CHRIST's work is the elevation of the spirit of man so that what has been born of the flesh may be born *again* of the spirit. (Jo. iii. 6.) And the new birth is not without accompanying pain. The ministry of the Church is in watching over this new birth whereby men are born again to live a new kind of life in the Kingdom of GOD. (Jo. iii. 3.)

9. This then is the work of CHRIST, the propagation of His truth which comes by faith, a GOD-given faith whereby men are helped and their hearts purified. His work is emphatically to make hearts clean, "by faith purifying them from sin." (Act xv. 9.) But if faith is to purify faith itself must be kept clean, and it cannot do this without some organization whereby its purity is watched, guarded, and divinely helped. Here is the need of that Church which is "the pillar and ground of the truth," watched over by Him who said: "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." (Mt. xxviii. 20.)

The high ideals which he taught, which he originated, have come down to our own time, not without opposition; yet they have spread even beyond the confines of his own realm, and have subtly influenced even those who have not embraced his whole teaching.

10. How are we to measure the success of

CHRIST'S work? He came to combat sin, to oust sin at any rate from the hearts of His professed followers. He would have no voluntary sin, no act, no thought, no desire, no imagination even. All that is defiling must be swept out of our inward life, if our heart is to be clean as He would have it clean. Here we must pause a moment to make a much-needed distinction. Sin indeed is one word, but forms and degrees of sin are many, varying from comparatively trivial lapses up to satanic malice. In sin it is mostly the malice that counts. Also there are momentary transient acts, coming and going almost without reflection ; and opposed to this is the abiding will to sin. Evidently there is a wide difference between the guilt of a hardly realized transient act and the guilt of the settled determination of the will, bent upon its own purpose in contemptuous disregard of the will of GOD. Some sin passes over the soul like the shadow of a summer's cloud, quickly passing over the landscape, darkening it somewhat for the moment, but leaving no permanent result. This sin is but the shadow cast from the outside ; it is not the darkness brooding within. Sin which blackens the heart is the sin which loves what GOD hates. It is an evil love which dwells as a *permanent* quality in the sin-darkened heart, defiling all that may come forth from that heart as water flowing from a spring defiled bears its defilement wherever it may flow.

11. These two types of sin cannot be held as reaching the same depth of moral turpitude. A momentary act is not the equivalent of a settled determination. A momentary lapse into the shadow of sin, who shall guarantee us against that? An act of such "sin" may have come and gone before the unbalanced mind has had time to value its morality. A quick emotion may have left in our small mind no room for another and a wiser second thought. Acts like these may come from inherited temperaments, from the sudden inrush of unwonted emotions, and though not exempt from blame, yet they are not on the same guilty level as the wilful and conscious preference of moral evil and the steady determination which says: "Evil be thou my good." This is the type of sin which must be banished from a Christian heart. In the Christian heart the love of such sin cannot simultaneously exist with the love of God, any more than the same chamber can be at one and the same time brilliantly lit up and yet be in Stygian darkness. Moments of moral weakness there may be, but these transient lapses are not on a par with cold, settled determination. The momentary cowardice of Peter was not the same as the settled policy of Judas.

12. The Christian, then, must be free from any love of what is mortally sinful; but freedom from all and sundry venial failings which vary with moods and temperaments remains a dream not realizable by mortal men. Such faults, if

they come, also they go. They are not the permanent furniture of the soul, of the house, but only dust brought in from time to time by passing visitors, and diligently removed and brushed away by the careful householder as soon as they are noticed. The venial transgressions to which mankind is prone are really outside the heart, casual intruders which slip in almost unperceived at unguarded moments, and are expelled as soon as their unwelcome presence is detected.

13. These are the occasional faults in normal Christians; they are not ornaments, but minor and temporary disfigurements. Yet their removal, the diminishing frequency of their appearance, are required to make the heart supremely clean.

Who shall cleanse a heart without toil? And whose toil shall make clean a heart defiled? Can a sin-stained heart unaided set to work effectually to cleanse itself? By itself, no. But it is here that the work of CHRIST takes up the task. He does not content Himself with instructions, however lucid; with words, however fair; but He helps with the subtle mysterious help of His various infused graces, sacramental and also uncovenanted. With these he eases the task and brings His order out of our chaos. The Church is His visible instrument in giving us this helping hand. By it we are told what to do and precisely how to do it. Always, day by day, hour by hour, mankind feels the want of help

and advice. So mankind needs His Church day by day even till the consummation of time. So His Church is to be enduring as is our need for it. The future will be very similar to the past. Looking back through the vista of years lit up for us by the light of history, we see that in every generation men have wanted the help of CHRIST. In every generation men have had this help offered to them as it is now offered to us. Offered, but not thrust upon unwilling recipients. We are free, free to make void even the work of CHRIST so far as in us lies, for "all do not obey the gospel" any more now than they did in the days of St Paul. (Rom. x. 16.)

14. Yet help is ever at hand. "Behold, I am with you all days." Many centuries have come and gone since He said those words, since He also said: "I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The gates of hell have tried to prevail, they are ever trying ; but we have only to lift up our eyes, and full in our sight there stands the Sign ever contradicted yet ever present. It stands because it was His work, for His work is good, though His material is but weak mortality. Into that weak mortality He infuses His spirit, breathes into it the breath of His life of grace, and it lives. At times it may seem to droop and fade, yet it does not fade away. Everything in this world of transition does droop and fade away. One thing alone survives, though it looks so weak that men think they can sweep it off from

the face of the earth. They have tried. How often do they proclaim the approaching disappearance of the Church of CHRIST! Well, look and see for yourself. The prophets of evil indeed have faded away; the Church still stands. Governments have made laws; the weight of secular power has tried to crush; penal laws with infinite cunning have essayed to bring about what could not be done by open violence; these laws have fallen into decay, and the Church still stands. With all the elements of decay that come from its human components, still it stands, an enduring monument to Him who built it, testifying to work done, not by us, but by Him who "hath done all things well."

INSTRUCTION I

CONFESSIONS OF DEVOTION

BY confessions of devotion I mean the confession of venial sins. As there is no obligation to confess venial sins, anyone who may choose to confess these sins does so entirely as a matter of choice, consequently, out of devotion. Where personal devotion, and not a law of the Church, is the determining motive, much of the doctrine laid down for the confession of serious sins does not apply.

The reason why there is no obligation to confess venial sins is that these sins are remitted, as to their guilt, by other means besides the Sacrament of Penance. Venial sin is thus blotted out by acts of contrition, by prayer, by self-denial, by any good and meritorious action. All such good deeds, besides being meritorious, are also compensations for the minor faults and failings of human nature. So there is no need of the Sacrament to cleanse the soul from these smaller blemishes, since they are effaced by virtuous actions done outside the Sacrament.

Nevertheless, the confession of venial sins forms the staple of most of the confessions of good living Catholics, and is a practice much to be commended. But it should be practised with due emphasis on the fact that such confessions

are voluntary, not obligatory. Hence, they do not fall under the same rules, or, at any rate, not to the same extent, as the confessions of those sins which are the proper subject matter of sacramental confession.

All sin being an offence against God, it is for God, as the person offended, to lay down the conditions on which His forgiveness of the injuries done to Himself will be condoned and pardoned.

At all times, from the earliest knowledge of the law of Nature, sin has been forgiven by acts of perfect contrition. This act of perfect contrition implies that we grieve because God is offended, because of the grave disobedience to His will, without any prevailing thought of our self-interest. As to the precise nature of this perfect contrition, theologians are not quite agreed in all details, but they do agree in this, that perfect contrition reconciles man to God without the previous instrumentality of the Sacrament.

Although this perfect act is within the range of average humanity, it is not easy to elicit at the time when a man wants it most, that is, when he finds himself in the state of mortal sin. So the God whom we offend Himself comes to our rescue and makes reconciliation easy by giving us an instrument whereby His forgiveness ness is conveyed to our souls; that is, the Sacrament of Penance. If we fulfil our part, God covenants to fulfil His; and so we can have

assurance of His pardon. Under this covenant He requires on our part confession of our misdeeds and a contrition which is not "perfect" contrition, but a kind of sorrow *founded on motives of faith*. A sorrow for sin, arising from loss of a good name amongst men, would be insufficient, as such sorrow would be purely natural; it would be motived by the good opinion of men, and GOD would be left out of account. Now, contrition is a return to GOD, and not simply a realization of social inferiority.

This contrition, united to the efficacy of the Sacrament, regularly blots out the guilt of sin, according to the covenant implied by Our LORD by His action towards His Apostles, related in John xx. 22, 23. "He breathed on them, and He said to them: Receive ye the HOLY GHOST; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

This contrition is a sorrow such that there can be legislation about it. Consequently, it is not merely a feeling of sorrow. It is so naturally assumed that contrition is "feeling sorry," that it is necessary to call attention to the fact that contrition, in the language of the Church, is not a "feeling." The Council of Trent (Sess. xiv. cap. 4), in its legislation, does not call it a "feeling," but terms it "Animi dolor," i.e., grief *of the soul*, not of *the senses*. It is a grief which is in the will. Were it merely

a "feeling," you could not legislate about it. You cannot make laws for feelings. You cannot enact by law when a man shall feel elated or depressed. Feelings accompany the action of the will; they may also prompt such action. But feelings are largely outside our control, and depend on other factors, quite independently of our will; also, the will can act, often has to act, in diametric opposition to our feelings. So legislators, whether lay or ecclesiastical, leave them out of account when legislating. The contrition which the Church requires, and for which legislation is enacted as needful for the Sacramental remission of sin, contains two mental actions—one of the intelligence, the other of the will. Our intelligence shows us that our misdeed is in opposition to the will of God, and knowing this, we *will* not do the same thing again, at least, not voluntarily. Intelligence may be brought under law, and utilized to stimulate the will. You can demand intelligent acceptance of facts and truths, and also legislate for the will, as, indeed, all legislators in fact do legislate, even in such simple matters as imposing a penalty of forty shillings for leaving open a gate leading to a railway track. The outcome of these remarks is that as contrition is the combined result of the action of our intelligence and of our will, it is easy to have, and to know when we have, this form of contrition. I may not *feel* that it is wrong to steal the choicest flowers in my

neighbour's garden, but *I know* that it is wrong ; so, if I am contrite for wrong-doing in this particular direction, I also know that I must use my knowledge, and induce my will to forbear in the future. "I know it is wrong ; therefore, I won't do it again." Here we have the essentials of sacramental contrition ; this knowledge of the understanding and this resolution of the will are within the compass of any well-disposed man's effort. They are easy of performance. They can be brought under positive law.

Feelings, then, are not essential as an element of contrition ; they are so evanescent, they come and go, they are so unstable that nothing solid can usually be built upon them. They are largely evidential of something, but they are not the thing itself. They are evidences of sorrow, usually, but not sorrow itself ; just as smoke is evidential of fire, but is not fire itself.

When our understanding is well informed upon any point, the knowledge acquired remains, speaking generally. But the will is very liable to change. It is influenced by many passing emotions, allured by enticing fancies, diverted and blinded by passion. All this may happen shortly after making the most determined resolutions ; they endure till some stronger influence comes, and temporarily obliterates them. But because they are *now* obliterated, it does not follow that they *never had* a real existence. When considering what is

essential for confession, what we have to take into account is the attitude of the will at the moment of confession; at that precise moment when we are receiving the sacrament. At this important moment, the will is rightly inclined; for the moment, at any rate, it is fixed. How the will may be deflected an hour hence we do not know, nor can we generally foresee. Even if we had this foreknowledge, mere knowledge without wilfulness does not affect our sacramental action. I am wide awake now; I know I shall sleep during the night; how does this knowledge affect or lessen my present wakefulness? Foreknowledge is not wilfulness. I know I always do add up a column of figures wrongly the first time I try to do it; I know I shall do it next time; but I don't want to add wrongly. Yet when the time comes for doing my addition sum, most likely I shall fail just as I have failed before. In spite of this, it remains true that I never meant to fail, even though I had a well-grounded foreknowledge that fail I should. Foreknowledge though it was, it did not *determine* the failure of my, as yet, unworked addition sum.

This helps to illustrate the attitude of the will in confession. Spiritual books tell us that we should lessen our faults by a *continuous* improvement. This is theory. We can tell the spiritual books that we don't improve much. This is practice. Which is at fault, theory or practice? Both may be faulty, so let us con-

sider them both. No doubt a continuous effort at eliminating faults ought to show success. We will all agree in this. But there comes a further question, often ignored: What precise measure of success? It is here that theory parts company with fact. One reason is that theory seldom or never takes due account of *all* the factors which enter into the problem of human amelioration. Theory says A B should equal X Y; so much effort should result in so much corresponding improvement. And so it would, if the conditions were so simplified as that. But the conditions are not simple; they are distinctly complicated.

If our failings were a fixed quantity, continuous effort would ultimately remove that fixed quantity. But our failings are not a fixed quantity; they sprout and grow with the ever-fresh luxuriance of self-sown weeds. While we are diligently removing one crop, another is maturing. To this the theorist answers: "You have been mowing the surface when you should have pulled up the roots." And this sounds very well, in theory, but in practice you will find that you cannot root up the weed without doing damage in other directions. Our Lord knew this, and His advice was wiser: "Let them both grow till the time of harvest." Wise advice, for some faults are part of human nature; you would have to destroy human nature as it is, as it is meant to be, and transform it into something else. Now, we are not meant

to be something else; we are meant to be human. If we had been intended to be seraphic, we should be seraphs. So we may make what effort we like to be seraphic, we shall still remain human, with human imperfections peeping out here and there. Faultless humanity was the privilege of one, and only one, and she is Immaculate, though human, by very special divine favour, and so stands in a category by herself. We admire, but cannot imitate.

It comes, then, to this, that the improvement which rewards our effort will always be *human* improvement, and, being human, will always be, somewhere, imperfect.

Success is shown, not by a continually *diminishing* quantity. A *diminished* quantity, yes, perhaps. We still remain human, and the perceptible lessening of minor faults is the triumph which marks the limit of our possibilities in this direction. With this we may be quietly, and humbly, content. If we came to fancy that we had rooted out all our human frailties, we should be in danger of thinking, with the Pharisee, "I am not as other men"—a dangerous illusion, worse than many combined faults and failings, a last state much worse than the first.

My object in saying all this is to warn us that subsequent falls into our customary imperfections are no proof of want of real contrition at the time of the reception of the Sacrament of Penance. When we left the confessional we

were the same persons who entered, as far as our natural personality was concerned; we still retained the same character, the same proclivities, and most probably still had the same surroundings in life. What should be the forecast? Given that we shall fall into minor faults, the evident presumption is that we should fall into our usual faults of habit and temperament. This is normal; falling into unusual defects shows that we have somehow deteriorated, and we must investigate. In practice, then, we should look for fewer lapses into usual failings; we should outgrow some of them; we should not contract quite new bad habits. Some faultiness will remain, faults on the surface; and as these have not the same dangers, neither have they the same divine safeguarding. With due care, we may safely reckon on being saved from mortal sin, but we are generally left to fight our own battles with these minor enemies, with everyday weapons, and with varying success.

We are left, I suppose, partly because of the comparative lightness of the issues involved, but also because of the greater ease with which the lesser guilt of venial sins is blotted out. No sacrament is required for their remission. They may be brought to the tribunal of penance, but this bringing is voluntary, not commanded. Every good action, heartfelt prayer, all self-denial, besides being meritorious, also blots out venial sin. The great theologians are emphatic

in this matter. St Thomas (iii, q. 87, art. 2) says: "Any impulse of grace or charity is sufficient for its remission" (i.e., remission of venial sin). Any impulse of grace being sufficient, no sacrament is necessary. Though not necessary, yet such minor faults may be usefully confessed; and indeed, they form the staple of the confessions of most Catholics.

There are some points as to confessions of this voluntary character which need emphasizing.

In the first place, the law laid down as to number and species, which is essential in the confession of mortal sins, is not essential in the case of sins merely venial. Cardinal de Lugo puts the doctrine concerning the confession of venial sins so clearly that I cannot do better than quote his words. (*De Poenitentia*, Disp. xiv, n. 133):

> "Sorrow on account of the multitude and frequency of venial sins is sufficient, as well as an intention of avoiding such multiplicity and frequency. As matter for the sacrament we may present *this multitude* and frequency, and *not* each individual sin taken *by itself*. . . . In like manner, one can make known the oft recurring and multitude of venial sins, sorrowing for *this frequency*, for such negligence and carelessness, and want of guard over our heart, *without* a sorrow for *each one* taken by itself."

From this doctrine it follows that round numbers (if we elect to give numbers) indicating frequency or rarity is all that is required, so far as number is concerned. Therefore (an important point), no long investigation is needed; and much time often spent (misspent) in settling this detail, which may be rapidly determined without any anxiety. Thus time is saved which can be more usefully employed. In the same way, the purpose of amendment is also simplified. Here again St Thomas is luminous and helpful. He says: "One should have the intention of disposing oneself *to lessen* venial faults" (iii, q. 87, art. 1 and 3).

This shows us that St Thomas is very wide in his teaching. He does not ask for a specific act in contrition, but such easy forms of repentance as is implied in the willingness to apply oneself to the task, not of blotting out what is venial but to the much easier effort of *diminishing* their *frequency*.

Thus we see that great comfort is to be derived from the teaching of master minds on this subject now under consideration. Anxiety as to number, species, depth of contrition, simply should not exist. Freedom of spirit, that rest of mind which comes from solid doctrinal teaching presented by such eminent authorities as those just quoted, should make these confessions tranquil, pacifying, and helpful. Not a few (teachers and taught alike), not keeping close to the doctrine of masters,

contrive to wring their minds with ingenious scruples, and pervert an instrument of peace into one of self-torture.

Previous to confessing sins, obviously, we must know them. This involves what we know as an examination of conscience. Very often people confine their examination to finding out real, doubtful and conjectural lapses. This is not quite the same thing as examining our conscience. After all, those who are now being addressed will find in their conscience the record of some good deed. This part is generally left out, yet it is an important half of our conscience, and should be known. Otherwise, it is like trying to find out our true financial position by adding up our debts and taking no notice of our assets.

We can simplify our examination by observing the kinds of fault we usually fall into. When we know this, we know what we can confess ; these will form the bulk of our budget of failings. Then come the infrequent sins, and for these we do not need any formal examination at all : their rarity makes their existence stand out in our memory ; without investigation, they come and clamour to be taken notice of ; we cannot be inattentive to what stands out so prominently from the even surface of our everyday lives.

There is a class of sins (which often cause much more worry than they are worth), and these are the "doubtful" sins ; so let us have a word about them.

If we honestly consider a sin doubtful, no matter what may appear to be its gravity, there is no law requiring us to confess it at all. The Council of Trent enacts that we are to confess "all the mortal sins of which we are conscious." Now, we are not "conscious" of what is doubtful. If we were conscious, we should not be doubtful. If we like, we may mention these as "doubtful," but this is a matter of choice and of discretion. If this is the doctrine with respect to mortal sins, which are obligatory matter of confession, the case is very simple when we doubt about what is venial. Except to ask advice, the best way is to leave them alone and say nothing.

In this matter it is well to realize that when we have reached the conclusion that anything is doubtful we have gone as far as we can go, and so have reached a full stop. Prolonged investigation is waste of time, fruitful only in producing confusion of mind and useless scruples.

It is well to know that we can reach three conclusions, each, in its own direction, quite final. A sin was either

(1) Certainly committed,
(2) Certainly not committed, or
(3) Doubtful.

When we have arrived at (1), (2), or (3), investigation has ended. Experience shows that those who will go on beyond the end only wander about confusedly in chaos.

Confessions such as are supposed in this instruction are meant as a help to spiritual life. Anything which makes them more helpful should be welcomed; anything which makes them harder kills their reason for existing. Therefore, no hard and fast rule can be laid down as to their frequency. This must depend upon individual needs and requirements. Still, we do not require a steam-hammer to crack walnuts. And not a few "Confessions of Devotion" might be called by a less religious name.

The best rule in this matter, where individual circumstances may so much alter cases, is to take the prudent advice of such as are qualified to give it.

MEDITATION IV

FEEDING THE MULTITUDE

"AND when JESUS had passed away from thence, He came nigh the sea of Galilee. And going up into a mountain, He sat there. And there came to Him great multitudes, having with them the dumb, the blind, the lame, the maimed, and many others; and they cast them down at His feet, and He healed them. So that the multitudes marvelled, seeing the dumb speak, the lame walk, the blind see; and they glorified the GOD of Israel. And JESUS called together His disciples and said: I have compassion on the multitudes, because they continue with me now three days, and have not what to eat; and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. And His disciples say unto Him: Whence then should we have so many loaves in the desert as to fill so great a multitude? And JESUS said to them: How many loaves have you? But they said: Seven, and a few little fishes. And He commanded the multitude to sit down upon the ground. And taking the seven loaves and the fishes, and giving thanks he brake, and gave to His disciples, and the disciples gave to the people." (Matt. xv. 28-36.)

The actions of Our LORD are recorded for us

not solely because they are history. They are history, and as historic events they have their (exoteric) value. But they have a didactic and symbolic (esoteric) value also, over and above their historical worth.

As a sample of what is meant, let us take this episode from St Matthew's Gospel, where in a few words we have set before us the history of CHRIST'S feeding the four thousand in the wilderness. Let us consider the incidents as this evangelist relates them. He tells us that a great number were so captivated by the teaching of CHRIST that they trooped after Him, following His footsteps as He wandered into the uncultivated lands, and, breasting a hill, sat Him down on a little eminence that formed a sort of natural seat. They had left their homes and occupations, they crowded round Him, men and women, young and old, all attracted by the charm of His wonderful personality. Under the spell of that soothing charm they went wherever He led, out into the wastelands, up the hillside —forgetting all save only Him whom they followed. We might say, "What a thoughtless crowd!" especially as they "had with them the dumb, the blind, the maimed and many others." (v. 30.)

2. These are the followers of CHRIST. From a social point of view, rather an unkempt crowd. Looking somewhat disreputable with its straggling rabble of blind and lame. Yet it is a representative crowd of Christians through the

ages: such as St Paul found and described "not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble." (1 Cor. i. 26.) Yet such as they are, they are also amongst the chosen of GOD. It is well to remember what was the raw material out of which the early Christians were fashioned; it was the poor to whom the Gospel was first preached and who were the first to embrace its teaching. The poor, at any rate, had the courage of their natural sentiments and simple convictions. CHRIST's answer to the inquiry of St John the Baptist was the injunction that the Baptist should be told that "to the poor the Gospel is preached." (Luc. vii. 22.) They followed CHRIST openly by day. The wealthy Nicodemus was also impressed by the teaching of CHRIST; but this highly placed man, "a ruler of the Jews," as St John calls him (Jn. iii. 1), came to Jesus by night. But it is fair to remember that when the crucial day of Calvary came Nicodemus was loyal and bravely helpful.

3. A crowd has many individuals, but few thoughts. This crowd thought of CHRIST, and somehow forgot itself. If they forgot themselves, CHRIST did not forget them. He called together His disciples and said: "I have compassion on the multitudes because they have continued with Me three days and have not what to eat." Are not these the words of a thoughtful man, the thoughts of one who could put himself in the place of others and feel for

them and with them? He would not have them suffer (except for a short time) because they had followed Him. This considerate thoughtfulness shows a truly human heart, one so attuned that it could vibrate in sympathy even with the minor troubles of this crowd: this passing hunger of the moment, not the grim hunger of want, but just the hunger of men a day's walk from their settled habitations. Their graver miseries he had already remedied. "The dumb, the blind, the lame, and many others . . . they cast at His feet, and He healed them." If we can read a man's character by his treatment of the feeble, the sick, the outcast, the flotsam and jetsam of humanity, that fringe of human beings on the outskirts of civilization which seems of no account, then we have here a test by which CHRIST must be ranked high indeed. It was unselfish sympathy; He sought no personal profit from His deeds of tender mercy; His reward was that they "glorified the GOD of Israel." Words that are words isolated and not fortified by deeds that correspond are not really convincing. But we are convinced by deeds even when unaccompanied by words. The evidential value of a deed ranks deservedly high above the fairest and most soothing of words. Here we have deeds bearing evidence of the character of Christ and showing the working of an unspoiled heart when face to face with the daily needs of men.

4. They had been healed of their grave

infirmities ; these they had brought to His notice. But when hunger, a smaller yet not less real need came upon them, they seem to have borne it in uncomplaining silence. The disciples seem not to have taken it into account at all. Being ordinary men, they behaved just as ordinary men would when met by an every-day inconvenience. But He, the Master, was not an ordinary man ; He shows his finer mould by His innate solicitude for others. He might have fed them there and then. This would have relieved their want ; it would have been evidence of His human sympathy, but it would have left out a lesson needed for our instruction. He calls His disciples together. He did not really want either advice or help from them. But these disciples and their successors whom they represented were to be His fellow-labourers ; they are His coadjutors now in their small way. Small as their part always is, He will not ignore it. He will not leave them unnoticed in the background while, by the deed He is about to do, He attracts to Himself, alone, the admiration and notice of the crowd. He is a faithful friend, and if he is thoughtful for the wandering crowd he is no less thoughtful for His chosen apostles. He calls them to Himself. This the crowd must have noticed. He consulted with them and tells them what are His own sentiments. They are good but plain men, stolidly practical within their narrow limits. They looked at things just as they seemed. "We are in a

deserted place," they argued; "how are we to get food enough to satisfy the hunger of such a crowd as this?" All quite true; the circumstances in which they found themselves amply justified their answer; indeed, He could have expected none other. Nor did He. But He wanted this answer in order to emphasize His lesson. They were to be His instruments in carrying out His work. They would have to face tasks seemingly as impossible as this one now present to them; tasks actually impossible to them. They must be taught by some incident which would make a lasting impression on them that what they could do, that they should do; what was beyond their power would then be done for them. "How many loaves have you?" He inquired, and they answered: "Seven." Not much, yet in His hands it was more than enough. There is a point we may notice here, and it is worth a momentary digression to notice it. It seems part of God's plan in nature to avoid what is really superfluous. Nature is more than bountifully equipped for all its many needs; yet, lavish as it may appear to our shallow minds, nothing is really redundant. The more we can manage to penetrate into the hidden meanings and purposes which hide beneath most of what appears to the eye of the onlooker, the more we discover lavish economy and orderly sequence. Order and law are the impress of the mind of God, just as disorder, waste, chaos, betray the handiwork of the

Spirit of Evil. It is so very easy to bring about destruction, but constructive orderliness reflects the creative intelligence which brings order out of chaos and light out of darkness. In all His conduct, CHRIST was nothing if not orderly, and in this episode we are presented with a characteristic example.

5. The multitude was scattered about as multitudes fortuitously coming together will scatter in all countries and in all ages. From the small eminence where He was seated, His eye glanced over the moving crowd. "And He commanded the multitude to sit down upon the grass." A trifling incident? Yet it is eloquent of his love of order and of His care for His now wearied following. They should rest, and He Himself would provide the food which they obviously could not procure for themselves. It was an easy task for Him to provide food. He had but to command the very stones to become bread, and bread they would have been. But now, to use our human way of speaking, He did not create out of nothing. Easy as the speaking of a creative word would have been to Him, He did not create bread. He took the already existing bread into His all-powerful hands ("All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth"—Matt. xxviii. 18), and the bread multiplied and abounded. "Giving thanks, He brake and gave to His disciples, and the disciples gave to the people." And so those thousands were fed; yet they were fed through the ministra-

tions of His disciples. He will not pass over such co-operation as can be given by His elected fellow workers.

6. In this manner He combines actual and immediate beneficence with instructive symbolism. His disciples are to be his instruments in carrying on His work on earth, both in His works of mercy and in His work of teaching. "He that hears you hears Me." He that hears the authorized teacher sent by CHRIST hears CHRIST Himself. The authorized teacher: for these words were not addressed to an indeterminate crowd; they were said to those men whom He Himself selected after a night spent in prayer. "And, going up into a mountain, He called unto Him whom He would Himself, and they came to Him. And He made that twelve should be with Him and that He might send them to preach." (Mk. iii. 13.)

So His disciples helped. Again, their help was not much, yet what they had the capacity to do, that, at His bidding, they did. This is their mission amongst mankind. CHRIST Himself is the real worker, working through His accredited followers who carry out His work. They do no creative work; their share is to provide the little bread which He multiplies; they give to the crowd what they themselves have previously received from Him to give, be it bread or be it doctrine. This is the claim of St Paul when he teaches the doctrine of the Eucharist: "For I have received of the Lord that

which I have also delivered unto you." (1 Cor. xi. 23.)

The disciples of CHRIST give the bread they have received of the LORD; not their own bread. They deliver the teaching they have received of that same LORD, and not the speculative conclusions, however ingenious, which they may have independently worked out for themselves.

7. What was it that the great giver of all good gifts gave to that hungry multitude in the wilderness? Having all power, to what extent did He manifest that power? When it was so easy to give, did He win their admiration by giving such a banquet as He Himself partook of when invited to dine by Simon the leper? No; He gave bread, plain bread, plenty of it, for when the four thousand were satiated, seven baskets were filled with what remained untouched. Why such simple fare? Because He would teach us that He gives what is sufficient, what He in His wisdom judges to be sufficient; but He will not give superfluities. What is necessary He will give, and give in good measure; what is not really needed He will not give. Here is the same lesson of lavish economy, true of our temporal needs as well as of our spiritual. He will give sufficient teaching, sufficiently authorized and sufficiently evidenced, but there He stays His hand. Why? Because He knows what is sufficient; more would be waste. This, too, seems the principle

on which is framed the answer to the rich man's request in the parable, when he asked that one from the dead might be sent to his brethren, and it is refused with the words: "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. . . . If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead." (Luc. xvi. 31.) Such evidence is superfluous, and would only be wasted, and therefore is not given. This is Our LORD's answer, given in seeming anticipation of many demands we hear from time to time in our advanced century (in this matter no more advanced than the first century itself): "Let us have some proof which we can call tangible; let some one actually come back from the dead and speak to us, and then we will believe." Will you? No. You will formulate some new requirements, some way of explaining away this "unusual" occurrence, this "apparent" return, and disbelieve as before. You may refuse the plain but wholesome bread offered to you, and ask for a more daintily prepared confection to suit your critical palate. You will ask in vain. Enough has been offered to you by Our LORD, who is the best judge of what is actually necessary for mankind at large. You are quite at liberty to refuse His terms; but you will get no others.

8. The giving of bread is also symbolical in another way. Bread is the accepted epithet for what is necessary and sufficient for man's

ordinary sustenance, and therefore is called the "staff of life." Many other foodstuffs are even more palatable, many more appetizing; yet in the long run man tires of more highly seasoned food much more quickly than he does of plain bread. As food most adapted to the generality of mankind, it symbolizes what is generally needful and generally sufficient; adapting the symbolism, we may say the same of the teaching, the authority, the discipline of the Church.

It is the most generally sufficient, the plainest, the most evidently authorized of all religious teaching. CHRIST'S action also was symbolical. "He broke and gave to His disciples, and they gave to the people." *His* bread, yet given not directly by His own hand, but by the hands of His chosen associates, who ministerially handed to the rest simply what had been given to them for distribution amongst the people who had followed Him into the wilderness. It was not given to the stay-at-homes, not to Herod and his courtiers; the simple were fed, the self-sufficient were left alone.

9. We have here one of the instances in which he manifests His twofold nature. The reality of His human nature is shown by the thought and care He manifested about the bodily needs of His hungry following. He shows the reality of His divine command over nature by the means he took to satisfy that hunger. As man, He showed compassion on the crowd; as GOD He

blessed a very inadequate provision of small loaves, and the bread was more than enough for the famished thousands. His divine power is made evident, yet there is no parade, no startling preliminaries; what He did He did so quietly that His superhuman power was known to have been exercised only when all was over. Perhaps this may shadow forth what may be in store for us when we shall have passed through the wilderness of this world's pilgrimage, and afterwards we may find that we have been fed miraculously when we knew it not.

10. As to His miracles, the nature of His mission demanded that He should give evidence of the divinity of that mission by proofs that should be as evidence, conclusive. Only what men deemed miraculous would be conclusive. The Jew had been trained to expect this, and had seen somewhat similar evidential proofs given from time to time by the prophets of old. Certainly they expected the miraculous from Him. They asked for it. "What sign therefore dost Thou show us that we may see and believe?" (Jn. vi. 30.) As such a sign, he fed the throng that had followed Him beyond the habitations of men, where food was not to be had. He did not give too many signs. A superfluity might even be less evidential as savouring of vulgar parade; nor were they ever commonplace. He never worked a wonder for His own exclusive benefit; always His work was for the immediate benefit of others, always evidently motived by the necessities of others.

And musing thus over the brief account given us of this instance of Our LORD's dealings with this crowd, we find that deep and lasting lessons are conveyed to us clothed in this parable in action. We do not always see these lessons, nor learn them. Well, this also was in His mind when those events were occurring. The mystery, the inward meaning wrapped up in the outward garb of quite ordinary daily happenings certainly was not usually visible on the surface. Seeing, the unenlightened eye could not see; hearing, the unspiritual ear could not understand the sound which echoed loudly yet conveyed no intelligible meaning. "To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of GOD, but to the rest in parables." So, too, we may seek to explain, yet is it necessarily our fault if our explanation is but a "parable" "to the rest"? He who fed the hungry, yet left many still unfed; He who gave sight to the blind yet left many in darkness. Why should some only be singled out to be objects of His compassion? We can but answer in the words of the man born blind: "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." (Jn. ix. 25.)

MEDITATION V

THE FRIENDS OF CHRIST

MARY MAGDALEN

Luke vii. 36-50

"AND one of the Pharisees desired Him to eat with him, and He went into the house of the Pharisee, and sat down to meat. And behold a woman that was in the city, a sinner, when she knew that He sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment; and standing behind at His feet, she began to wash His feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment. And the Pharisee, who had invited Him, seeing it, spoke within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would know surely what manner of woman this is, that toucheth him, that she is a sinner. And Jesus answering, said to him, Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee. But he said, Master, say it. A certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And whereas they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which therefore of the two loved him most? Simon answering said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most.

And He said to him, Thou hast judged rightly. And turning to the woman, he said unto Simon, Dost thou see this woman? I entered thy house, thou gavest me no water for my feet, but she with tears hath washed my feet, and with her hairs hath wiped them. Thou gavest me no kiss, but she, since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but she with ointment hath anointed my feet. Wherefore, I say to thee, many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much. But to whom less is forgiven, he loveth less. And He said to her, Thy sins are forgiven thee. And they that sat at meat with Him, began to say within themselves, who is this, that forgiveth sins also? And He said to the woman: Thy faith hath made thee safe, go in peace."

MARY MAGDALEN

THE Gospel message brought by our LORD to mankind, taught by His own living words, taught still more impressively by the drama of his life and death, meets with one unexpected obstacle. When we hear the prophecy that He is to be the sign that is to be contradicted we feel that it is but natural that such a sign must meet with opposition. Opposition from those who may think His message too exacting ; too stern ; His restrictions of human liberty too grievous a burden to lay on mere human shoulders ; all these arguments for opposition we can foresee. We are not similarly prepared for the opposition He has to encounter because His message is too good and much too liberal.

Some natures seem to assimilate quite easily the idea of GOD's justice, His unerring justice, but they distrust his equally unerring mercy. Infinite justice they admit must exist in GOD ; infinite mercy is to them unimaginable ; the mercy which largely tempers justice might as well not exist.

2. This is a grievous injustice to GOD, and a deplorable misfortune for such men. But the deplorable misfortune was foreseen, and having forestalled the difficulty by His words, He

forestalls it yet more emphatically by His actions: "though you will not believe Me, believe the works." He would show His mercy in the working, so that seeing what He does we may quite realize what He is.

Familiar examples are the best. Who does not know of His mercy to Mary Magdalen? The old story so ever new, like a stately evergreen that keeps the garment of its own foliage year in and year out. Antecedently, we should have thought that CHRIST and Magdalen never would have met. They belonged, it would seem, to the opposite poles of social life. As a class, they did: CHRIST stands for the perfect observance of all GOD'S laws; Magdalen is the representative of their most injurious violation. But classes are one thing, individuals quite another. This we must bear in mind, we must not fall into the mistake of supposing that any individual completely represents a class. As a matter of fact, CHRIST does not deal with classes, He deals with individuals only. The class may be good, the individual bad; as the Apostles as a class were good, but Judas the individual Apostle was bad. Conversely the same holds good with respect to Magdalen. Weeds may spring out of the most highly cultivated soil: the brilliantly hued cactus flourishes on the arid sandy waste.

3. We do not get the story quite at the beginning. Magdalen must have known of CHRIST, most likely had seen Him and heard

Him speak long before she made up her mind to seek Him out, where He sat at meat in the house of the Pharisee. That determination shows a change of heart: also it shows courage and perseverance; it shows that she had thought and considered, and had counted the cost, and meant to pay it. Not by a secret night visit, like Nicodemus, but with a courage that was not mere boldness she would face the scorn which might be poured upon her. Even this gives us something to think over; Christianity is not for the timid; it is for those who have the courage not simply to formulate a resolution, but also the steady fortitude to carry it out.

Magdalen comes before us showing both courage and fortitude. She also comes before us as a "sinner." When applied to a woman the word is conventional; but all sin involves disobedience. As the motive for disobedience varies, so may the gravity of the sin. When the motive for disobedience to any law of God is callous contempt for God and His Law, then evidently the sin is great. Actual disobedience is a grave matter in itself, but it is not always that the delinquent *appreciates* the gravity of his disobedience; hence the distinction between formal and material sin, connoting the presence or absence of moral appreciation of one's actions. This appreciation is frequently lacking in those who are carried away for the moment by tempestuous emotions

which in their mad unreasoning career sweep away all thought and reasoning capacity. A being endowed with reason should not allow his reasoning faculty to be swept away, that is true. But to keep a balanced judgment in the midst of the storms of temptation is a thing to pray for daily, "Lead us not into temptation." In such temptations men do not naturally keep a calm balanced judgment. There are temperaments whose qualities expose them to the blind onrush of emotions, too vehement to heed at the moment the warning cry of conscience, so seldom absent, but unnoticed, amid the turmoil. Not heard then, but the small still voice makes itself heard afterwards. Even then if it be late, it is not too late.

4. Deep and overmastering emotions may dwell in noble natures, and occasionally lead them into disobedience. The mastery in our complex nature obtained for the time being by emotion over reason need not be lasting. Emotions, like storms, wear themselves out; and when the storm has subsided then the Prodigal, clad only in the rags and tatters of worn-out sensibilities, comes to himself and says, "I will arise and go to my Father."

Not every one who sins is a prodigal. Indeed a prodigal wastes on others, perhaps, more than he wastes on himself. He has not the deadliest quality of sin, utter selfishness. Some are prodigal of money, some of affection. Mary was

sensually prodigal of affection, but seems to have been free, from what we can glean of her character, from merely sordid vice. Her sensitive emotionalism opened the door to the seven cast out by CHRIST, but had not swamped the native nobility of her natural disposition. The emotions passed; the native nobility remained, a natural foundation for grace to build upon. Grace urged her to make full reparation for much disobedience and self seeking. This came as an appeal to reason, and she could listen to reason now, so she came to the house of the Pharisee.

In Magdalen the grace of GOD must have found a congenial soil in which to plant its seedlings. It found a nature warped by the heat of passions, led astray by the evil spirits expelled by CHRIST, yet not wholly selfish, naturally capable of perfect self abandonment, and, still more remarkable, capable of clinging fixedly to a once made resolve. Impulsive she was, but her impulsiveness was not devoid of nobler qualities.

5. She found the guests reclining on couches or settees placed on three sides of a low square table, the fourth side being left unoccupied for the convenience of serving. Resting on their left arms the guests leaned over the low table; their feet (without the sandals, which they had taken off on entering the house) resting on the outer extremity of the couch. So that Magdalen coming in, could kneel at

the feet of a guest, and yet not catch his eye. CHRIST knew that His feet were watered with tears and dried by the abundant tresses of the weeping woman. But He took no notice; He said never a word, yet He did not draw in His feet. And all the while the Pharisee watched and wondered, turning things over in his mind. Possibly a better man than most of his class, this Pharisee, but he was a man of the world, who not only could see things, but could also see into things. He had his own idea of a Prophet, evidently an exalted idea. He also knew where it was necessary to draw the line between kindness and the right observance of unwritten social laws. Many have this same knowledge, and are right in upholding what may be hard upon an individual, but is certainly best for civilization at large. Yet there are few laws in practical life which do not occasionally want to be applied gently. Also, they may have to yield to some higher law. As our LORD was soon going to bring home to him, the Pharisee was inclined (as are so many who are not entirely Pharisees) to exact a rigid observance of some unwritten laws on the part of others, while he allowed himself abundant latitude in neglecting other unwritten laws, no less important, when he felt himself disinclined to keep them. And he had somewhat lost himself in thought while he philosophized about his guests, bidden and unbidden, coming to this conclusion so natural

under the circumstances, "If this man really were a Prophet surely, surely He would know what manner of woman this is" . . . when he was unexpectedly brought to himself by the voice of the "Prophet." "Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee." With perfect courtesy CHRIST does not bluntly and at once relate His reproving parable without the formal approval of His host. A small thing this in itself, yet it indicates innate refinement of feeling, the perfect and thoughtful consideration for others which is so conspicuous in all the public and social dealings of CHRIST. In many Christians these qualities are as conspicuously absent. At no time were they more evident in CHRIST'S behaviour than now. "If He knew!" said the Pharisee to himself. Well, He did know; He knew so fully and with such perfect knowledge. Poor Pharisee! he was feeling a touch of some little superiority at his own keener insight, and all the while he was practically blind to all that was clear to the unerring vision of CHRIST. There are still Pharisees amongst us who see just as clearly; and are just as blind.

The parable of the two debtors, the one owing a trifle, the other a considerable sum, we have probably in a condensed form. Both are kindly forgiven their respective debts, and then comes the question, "what are their respective feelings towards the generous creditor?" There can be only one answer, and that

Simon gives correctly enough. "Thou hast judged rightly," and now he has to listen to the quite unexpected application.

6. "Dost thou see this woman?" Certainly he did, and much wished that he did not; he resented her presence, and had CHRIST not been there she would not have remained long disgracing his house. In no sense did he approve of her or of her unwelcome presence. And yet, what historic immortality he has, he owes to her and her presence on this occasion.

Next, we find that CHRIST brings to his notice (and incidentally to ours) some little details that had been slurred over. The Pharisee presumably meant to be civil to his invited guest. His invitation in itself was evidence of that; yet there are guests and guests, and an unwritten, but widely understood code regulates the nice shades of hospitality to be meted out to one of our own social circle and to another who is for the moment elevated out of his natural sphere, and for the time being conventionally treated as an equal. The Pharisee did not forget his own superior social position, he did not really obtrude it on his guests as he probably thought that it was too obvious to need accentuation. Yet he felt he was justified in drawing the line somewhere, and now CHRIST, who had, up to this, tacitly accepted the Pharisee's estimate of their respective social levels, unmasks his inmost supercilious thoughts as reflected in his

actions. We, too, are enlightened concerning a habit of Our Lord in His external conduct. He ignores what He sees clearly. He is silent, but silent only to speak later with accumulated force. Do not let us deceive ourselves into believing that His silence means blindness; that He says nothing because He has seen nothing. This lesson here taught to the Pharisee was not meant for his benefit only.

"I entered thy house: thou gavest Me no water for My feet." Pacing the dusty roads with sandal-shod feet, the guest, on arriving, would naturally appreciate the needful service of the slave whose duty it was to bathe the feet of the entering guest. But the slave would not consider that any one who entered was a guest entitled to his services. Slaves were quick-witted enough to interpret and silently carry out the unspoken intentions of their masters. This "Prophet" from Nazareth (supposing that He was a prophet?) was of the industrial class; it was honour enough to invite Him to dine; He could not expect, nor would He be offered, all the social courtesies a man presses on his social equal. So no instructions were given: now he hears the calm voice of his guest with clear yet not unkind incisiveness, putting all his discourtesy in its true light, and he no doubt very sincerely regretted his somewhat haughty omissions. A Prophet! Yes indeed, and one who read him like an open book, and, most disconcertingly, read him

aloud. To be read accurately was bad enough; no one likes to be convicted openly even before friends and mere slaves. But the Prophet went even beyond that. He openly contrasts him with the "woman," and much to his disadvantage. The man of position, accidental position, thinking too much of his own conventional elevation, fails to show quite ordinary consideration to one distinguished in a way by his actions, yet, after all, one he rather looked down upon. And this was an indication that his heart was wrong; he put himself first; his guest might come anywhere. This was in sharp contrast to the conduct of the woman. Water was cheap enough, but the Pharisee did not trouble to give that. The woman gave tears, and such tears cannot be bought with gold! Her tears welled forth from her heart as truly as from her eyes; the woman did superlatively what the Pharisee quite omitted. If CHRIST had been silent at the moment and seemed unconscious and indifferent, he really was neither, and amply redeemed His silence, for all civilized mankind for centuries knows that He did see and did appreciate. He had allowed nothing to escape Him. The Pharisee did not see his way to offer the customary anointing, common as it was; the woman lavishes the costliest products of Nature and of human skill.

7. What is the lesson underlying all this? CHRIST surely cared nothing for slave-given

courtesies! For Him, water was not cheap, nor was costly ointment valuable. No. But these things derive their value from the intention of the giver, and also from their symbolism. They are as the hands on a clock face, which indicate, outwardly, the inward working of complicated wheels. The Pharisee with the narrow horizon set for him by his class stands for many a citizen of credit and renown; not a Nicodemus or a Joseph of Arimathea perhaps, but outwardly a man living an averagely respectable life, and with no more than the average failings of numerous compeers. He had a good opinion of himself. There was not much in him, but he thought there was, till his eyes were opened. His debts were as fifty pence. If CHRIST did not blame him overmuch for sins of commission, there were plenty of omissions, for which he was surprised to be called to account. There are many who honestly think they are living blameless lives, "Because," they say, with the blush of modest worth mantling on their cheeks, "I don't do any wrong." Very well; but you leave undone very much that emphatically ought to be done; kind words, gentle judgments; timely help, and a reluctance to jump at easy conclusions which are only easy from your want of thought. And now the Pharisee may be left alone to do his own thinking, we have to think about the other personage in this episode.

We call her Mary Magdalen. As a matter of

fact, St Luke, with perfect tact, does not mention any name, and after all, for the object of the lesson, her name is immaterial. Not *who* she was, but *what* she was, gives point to Our LORD'S teaching ; and the name Magdalen has become so linked with this woman that its very mention at once recalls this scene in the house of Simon the Leper. Yet in the incident before us CHRIST must not be thought to be dealing generally with a class named from her, CHRIST does not deal with classes, nor do we ; we are studying His dealings with an individual woman who was known to be a "sinner."

8. Sinners, of course, are not confined to one sex. Sins are open to the choice of either equally. Still there are sins and sins. There are sins dyed deep with cold calculating malice, sins long planned, which cry for vengeance before GOD and man. That is one kind ; and there are unpremeditated falls due to human weakness, sins which arise from mistaken uses of qualities in themselves noble, but from wrong applications branching out into defects. No one denies their gravity ; yet they indicate a widely different (if still culpable) attitude towards GOD. Malice deserves all the punishment it gets, momentary weakness can win pity. While we cannot make any real division, yet speaking broadly, men are more prone to sins of malice, while the sins of women are often motived by quick emotions.

In the case before us it would seem that the woman originally had a nature not without noble instincts, though now deteriorated till it deserved its public epithet: soiled as that nature had been, we see how Our Lord treats it when the heart's reaction had brought the wanderer to Him.

It was gentle treatment; and can we think out any reason for its gentleness? Because the same reasons may influence our judgments at least in matters which have not yet received socially adequate treatment. Men recognize that womankind is handicapped. "Women and children first," comes naturally to mankind because of the understood handicap. It is not simply motherhood, but the Nature-given potential motherhood that handicaps. Sum up in one's mind all the sacrifice of self, the love, the minute care, the forethought, the utter forgetfulness of self that are needed to constitute a mother. So needful that they are antecedently implanted by Nature itself. The capacity for an outpouring of protecting love is inborn in the heart of woman, latent till called into natural activity, in some cases. A capacity when it finds no outlet grows restless, often with a blind restlessness. How many women escape having at times a dim consciousness of an obscure, unsatisfied capacity, protecting, loving, altruistic, vague but vast. Elemental forces are still forces, even though they are refused recognition. It is the object

of Christian education and training to teach the Christian how to deal with, and suitably control, these forces, even when but half understood. A force that requires to be combated by the Sacraments is not to be despised or too much minimized. The supernatural is built on the natural. The foundation being Nature, is none too solid, but you cannot build on anything else ; so even when dealing with grace, Nature must not be ignored completely. When we think over CHRIST'S treatment of this woman, we know that His unerring knowledge of the human heart influenced His actions and His words. There is an inclination to generalize from Christ's conduct on this occasion. It is true that CHRIST did want us to generalize from some of his individual actions, but generalization cannot be carried further than this : that given a similar character, similar realities of contrite love, then CHRIST'S action would be the same. This generalization is one of the objects for which incidents are recorded ; but this is not the same as wanting to argue as to what is CHRIST'S estimate of any class of sin or sinner. For just as GOD creates each individual soul, so does CHRIST deal with each soul individually. He deals moreover with the individual as *he is now* : not with that individual *as he may have been* at some period of *his past life*. This is an important point to think over, as it may affect our own mind, and as to how it may affect our dealings with others. It shows

that we may at times be justified in dealing simply with the present, and with CHRIST, we must have the humanity to ignore what is buried in the past.

9. At the same time we must not extend pity too far or too indiscriminately. CHRIST Himself did not exercise universal, indiscriminate, or unconditional mercy. He showed to Herod the King none of that finely tempered mercifulness which He bestowed on Mary. Why? Not, perhaps, because of the different quality of their sinfulness, but rather because one repented with bitter tears, and public self-abasement, while the other remained his proud self. Mary possibly had many excuses. Her temperament was emotional; as the sister of Lazarus we hear of no mother and father; perhaps she had missed the home training received by her elder sister. Hers seems a strong nature not adequately disciplined by early home restraints, with natural courage which had degenerated into contempt of conventionalities, one who welcomed the wild unchecked impulse of the moment. How easily would such a character burst the barriers of feebly apprehended moral restraints!

And bursting these barriers constitutes sin? Certainly it does, and grave sin. Yet often enough in the whirling emotions sin is but dimly perceived, if perceived at all. Passion in its stormy onrush tends to flood out the

reason which at first held in check the rising tide of inclination. It ought not to have done this, and sin often lurks in neglected premonitions. Like other storms, the storm of passion passes, and when the quiet sunlight once more shines through the broken storm clouds and reveals the storm-wrought havoc, then something of the calm of reason returns, and with the calm sorrow and deep remorse; sometimes also, a vehement longing to make adequate amends.

It was the longing to make adequate amends that brought Mary into the publicity of the house of the Pharisee. It is the vehement desire to break the idol and pay loving worship to the true God. This shows change of heart; this change means, as it were, the new birth, the emerging of the new man from out of the wreckage of the old: a phœnix rising from its burnt out ashes.

10. Christ read all this process written on the heart of the weeping woman kneeling at His feet. Could He ignore what He saw? Were not those tears welling up from a soul, not merely a heart, in anguish, a real anguish whose value He could estimate aright. Should it all count for nothing? Here indeed was much love; formerly it was not conscious hatred, but thoughtless ignoring where there should have been thought. Should have been, perhaps would have been, save for poor human frailty. How truly he could gauge that frailty,

and respond with mercy and entire forgiveness.

We are apt to concentrate our attention on one side of a question and ignore other aspects. We do this with sin. "There is the sin," we say as if that was all that could be said. It is not all. There is our conduct after sin. This, from its lasting results, is more important than the sin. Because CHRIST notices and weighs *both* the sin and our *conduct subsequent* to the sin. He notes (often enough without appearing to take any notice), all, even to the trivial details which escape us, and stores it up in His unfailing memory. "Do you see this woman?" He asked the Pharisee, "I entered thy house . . . thou gavest Me no water for My feet . . . with tears has she washed them, and wiped them with her hair. . . . Thou gavest Me no kiss, she hath not ceased to kiss My feet." Not one lowly and loving act had escaped Him . . . "wherefore I say to thee, many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much," and to the woman He said gently, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

Forgiveness means reinstatement with Him; the white robe is brought forth and once more clothes the forgiven; again is the ring placed on the finger, and now there is joy among the angels (who surely know when and why they should rejoice), because of the conduct after sin. There is this difference between the

breaking of most physical laws and the breaking of moral law. If we wilfully lose an eye, we can never again get another seeing eye ; but if we poison our soul even unto death, we may yet regain spiritual life and health. Upon conditions, not very onerous conditions either, all things considered. And they are all exemplified in Mary Magdalen. There is a break with the past, there is the admission of guilt, which is confession, and there is the formal acceptance of confession by CHRIST, and the cancelling of sin, which is absolution, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

11. Now gathering together the threads of thought which we have handled one by one, as a result, what have we gathered as to the character of CHRIST? Could justice be better tempered with mercy? Could strength be better blended with tenderness? Could anything be more divine? and the Pharisee serves as a foil ; he helps to accentuate the divergence between the ordinary conclusions of men, and the direct insight of CHRIST. Not that the ordinary conclusions of men are to be lightly set aside ; CHRIST did not condemn or reprove the Pharisee for his judgment of the publicly-known sinner, or for his silent half contemptuous tolerance of her. He condemned the Pharisee for his conduct to Himself. "You gave Me no kiss . . . she hath not ceased to kiss My feet." Of the two, the Pharisee had led the less blameworthy life, he had owed but fifty

pence, not five hundred. Such lapses as he had made CHRIST had, presumably, forgiven them also. But he does not emphasize the fact of His forgiveness except by the indirect method of His parable. But to the woman He says definitely, "Go in peace." Words which produced what they signified. And there often is good reason for the difference which seems accentuated here.

12. And this leads to another instructive thought. We have not so much natural difficulty in realizing that GOD may generously pardon minor failings. But when it is a question of a deeply stained life, then the realization of GOD's great goodness is not so easy. Yet it is more easy for GOD to forgive a past than it is for a man or woman to forget it. It is almost natural that there should lurk in the repentant heart a haunting misgiving, "GOD can forgive, yes ... but oh! ... will He also forget?"

Now we too easily forget the immeasurable distance that stretches between the actions of man and the actions of GOD. A man may be forgiving; but one who also forgets an injury is not met with every day. A thought still more disquieting may remain. "Is it even possible that GOD could forget?"

These misgivings are most natural, and seem to rest upon plausible arguments. And yet they do not, they rest on the sandy foundation afforded by the supposition that GOD is dwarfed to the puny stature of man. Really these mis-

givings presuppose that GOD can have no elevation of heart, no generosity outside the limits of man's circumscribed vision. We must use these terms in speaking of GOD, for we have none other ; yet we know how weakly our ideas and words shadow forth GOD's reality. We know well how impossible certain things are to us ; unconsciously we read the same impossibility into GOD, forgetting CHRIST's warning words (Matt. xx. 26), "With men this is impossible, but with GOD all things are possible." If all things, then certainly the equivalent of this merciful oblivion. Or else, why did CHRIST say to the woman, "Go in peace." What peace can there be in a heart oppressed by ever present and bitter memories? Surely when He spoke, He meant that there should be peace in that sorrowing heart ; He meant to contribute, not to withhold, all that was necessary on His part to secure that peace. He means that His forgiveness shall be known to include generous oblivion on His part, and that our memory, like His, shall retain only a softened and not an anguished recollection. But may not this divine forgetfulness be only what we would wish to be a reality? But He Himself makes this very oblivion the burden of an exquisite parable. The Father of the prodigal said, "My son was dead and is alive again." And in the joy he felt at seeing him again alive he lost all memory of the time when that son was dead.

13. We cannot read about Mary without some wonder as to how we may stand in the sight of Our Lord. That we either are in debt to Him, or that at some time we have been in debt, is hardly open to question. Perhaps we have done what we could by way of reparation, feeling all the while how trivial such contribution has been. Tears, or some superfluity which we gave up. In themselves trivial perhaps, yet in their acceptability before God, not trivial. For many reasons. Human power can do nothing in God's sight which is not in itself puny, and trifling. But it is not so much the thing which is done which determines value with Him: it is the motive, the will which prompts the action and clothes it with such worth as it may have in His sight. The widow's mite, as to its value with us, was but a mite; before God it outweighed treasures of gold and silver. Why? Because of the value of the motive hidden away and unseen by us deep in the widowed heart, yet it was the one thing that appealed to the eye of God. Treasures of gold and silver we may not have, nor are they wanted; the far more precious motives which stir up the heart to action we can all have, if we want to have them. God wants from us only what we can give. God asks for change of conduct, change of motive, the resolute will henceforward to put God first and foremost, to subordinate all to His known good pleasure. When these aspirations fill the heart, it is a

sign that they have emptied out of it all that previously dwelt therein.

Then we have no need for misgivings, even if the eye of God looking kindly down upon what is to be seen now, beholds only the sepulchre, which our hands, with His unseen assistance, have painfully raised over the dead and buried past.

MEDITATION VI

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

(John xi. 1-44.)

"Now there was a certain man sick named Lazarus of Bethania, of the town of Mary and Martha her sister. And Mary was she that anointed the LORD with an ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair; whose brother Lazarus was sick. His sisters therefore sent to Him, saying, LORD, behold him whom thou lovest is sick. And JESUS hearing it, said to them, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of GOD: that the SON of GOD may be glorified by it. Now JESUS loved Martha, and her sister Mary, and Lazarus. When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He still remained in the same place two days. Then after that He said to His disciples, Let us go into Judea again. The disciples said to Him, Rabbi, but now the Jews sought to stone Thee, and goest Thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours of the day? If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world; But if he walk in the night, he stumbleth, because the light is not in him. These things He said, and after that He said to them: Lazarus our friend sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep. His disciples therefore said: LORD, if he sleep,

he shall do well. But JESUS spoke of his death: and they thought that He spoke of the repose of sleep. Then JESUS said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead: And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe: but let us go to him. Thomas therefore, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. JESUS therefore came, and found that he had been four days already in the grave. (Now Bethania was near Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off.) And many Jews were come to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Martha therefore, as she heard that JESUS was come, went to meet Him, but Mary sat at home. Martha therefore said to JESUS: LORD, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But now also I know that whatsoever Thou wilt ask of GOD, GOD will give it Thee. JESUS saith to her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith to Him: I know he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. JESUS said to her: I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, although he be dead, shall live. Believeth thou this? She said to Him, Yea, LORD, I have believed that Thou art CHRIST, the SON of the living GOD, who art come into this world. And when she had said these things, she went, and called her sister Mary secretly, saying: The Master is come, and calleth for thee. She, as soon as she heard this, riseth quickly and cometh to Him.

For JESUS was not yet come into the town, but was still in that place where Martha had met Him. The Jews therefore, who were with her in the house and comforted her, when they saw Mary that she rose up speedily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth to the grave, to weep there. When Mary therefore was come where JESUS was, seeing Him, she fell down at His feet, and saith to Him, LORD, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. JESUS therefore when He saw her weeping, and the Jews that were come with her weeping, groaned in the spirit, and troubled Himself, and said: Where have you laid him? They say to Him, LORD, come and see. And JESUS wept. The Jews therefore said: Behold, how He loved him. But some of them said, Could not He that opened the eyes of the man born blind, have caused that this man should not die? JESUS therefore again groaning in Himself cometh to the sepulchre: Now it was a cave, and a stone was laid over it. JESUS saith: Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith to Him, LORD, by this time he stinketh, for he is now of four days. JESUS saith to her: Did I not say to thee, that if thou believe, thou shalt see the glory of GOD? They took therefore the stone away. And JESUS, lifting up His eyes said: FATHER, I give Thee thanks, that Thou hast heard me. And I know that Thou hearest me always, but because of the people who stand about have I said it: that they may believe that

Thou hast sent Me. When He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth. And presently he that had been dead came forth, bound feet and hands with winding bands, and his face was bound about with a napkin. JESUS said to them: Loose him and let him go."

THERE is so much to occupy our attention in Our LORD'S public life that we may overlook the fleeting glimpses we get from time to time of His relations with His intimate friends. If His public life unfolds His mission to us, His private intercourse with His intimates reveals the man himself. In meditating about Him, these are the revelations we want. We want to know the inmost heart of this Man as that heart is unveiled to us by the human actions done at the prompting of that heart. The heart may not always be a diplomatic counsellor, but this quality it has: it is true. It cannot for any length of time conceal its intimate goodness or badness. Unwittingly it betrays itself. Now the heart is the man. Diplomacy and other expedients are employed to disguise the heart and its natural promptings sometimes good, often enough evil. Evil and good are most distinctly evidenced by actions. The heart has another medium for translating its intimate workings, for out of a full heart the mouth speaketh. Actions and words then lift a veil which usually screens from our view that

which is most worth gazing upon, that is, the motives springing up in the hidden recesses of the heart.

2. In his account of the raising of Lazarus, St John gives us many of Our LORD's words and actions to ponder over.

Amongst the friends of CHRIST the family of Lazarus, including Martha and Mary, seems to have been specially beloved. We are not left to gather this impression for ourselves, because St John tells us in so many words that JESUS loved these three whom the Apostle mentions by name. The fact was well known. And the fact being so well known brings out a feature in Our LORD's character: not only were His affections strong and well known, but at the same time they were so wisely managed that they never caused even the shadow of jealousy among the favoured few. St John, himself the "beloved" disciple, writes sympathetically of these three who as all knew were also beloved of the Master.

When sickness fell upon Lazarus, and his sisters became legitimately anxious at the serious turn the illness was taking, they could think of no more compelling message to send to the Master than this simple notification, "He whom Thou lovest is sick." This is eloquent brevity. How much it tells us without words! It tells us of the deep trust and absolute confidence He had inspired in those who knew Him best.

3. What is the result of this simple message

appealing so directly to His loving heart? Is He at once moved to any display of responsive affection? Does He show any emotion at all? Strangely enough to our way of thinking, He does not. He is quite calm ; but He explains the reason of His calmness, though His hearers at the moment did not appreciate His words at their true value. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God." For the ultimate glory of God ; but at the moment He knows the anguish of heart in the household which sent the message, and—He leaves them to bear their natural sorrow as best they can. This is hardly our idea of showing affection for any sufferer dear to us. Yet this is the course He chooses to follow now, and what may be His reasons?

One general lesson we must take well to heart, and that is that if Our Lord seems to be inattentive, seems to take no notice, it is only seeming : it is we who draw a wrong conclusion : it is not evidence of callousness on His part. Another lesson : it is no part of His plan to reserve all natural sorrows for the bad, for those He must hate, while He smooths over the rough places in life for His favourites. Quite the contrary. He carried His own cross. He may appear to disregard our supplications, He may appear untouched by our griefs ; but it is appearance only ; He sees, and knows and weighs aright every pain, every untoward event. Often enough He does nothing at the

time, yet all the while His mind is full of His own maturing plans, and His seeming inattention now will result in bringing glory to God and ineffable consolation to those who were apparently ignored. All this we shall see exemplified presently. He works at His own time and place ; He waits till He considers that time is ripe and the circumstances appropriate, thereby giving us impressive lessons for our impatience, the unrestrained impetuosity that clamours for instant satisfaction. Wait—that is your present part in the programme.

4. He was not really unmindful now ; He was not inconsiderate, even. He allowed the present suffering because His foreseeing eye also beheld the joy that was to come, joy caused by this very sorrow, joy that never would have been felt were it not for this present grief. How many joys come to mankind in this way? And the joy is all the greater joy because of the dark cloud of sorrow through which the sun ultimately bursts with such fullness of glorious contrast.

He waited till the time was ripe, then He said, "Let us go into Judea again." Having only just fled from the murderous rage of the Jews, who had sought to stone Him, naturally, the disciples looked upon this project as most unwise. They argued their best against the project, in all simple sincerity thinking their own plain conclusion the only one possible.

On His part, knowing the goodness of heart which prompted their remonstrance, He over-

looked their density of understanding, and without any premature disclosure of His plans tried to let some light dawn on the situation. "Lazarus our friend sleepeth." Their unawakened minds took the words with direct literalness, drawing conclusions which seemed to them self-evident, and yet were hopelessly wrong. If amongst the first, they are not the only people who take Our LORD's words and apply them according to their own limited conceptions. His words, yes, but their interpretation? For men can draw quite erroneous conclusions even from the words of CHRIST, as did these good and simple-hearted men on this occasion. So others besides the Apostles need an authoritative interpretation of the words of CHRIST. On this occasion He had to interpret them Himself. He had to speak to them "plainly." That is, He had to come down to their level and talk of human things in human words. "Lazarus is dead," He said, and added this rather surprising comment: "and I am glad for your sakes."

5. "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad." These are words which surely need elucidating. One point we should bear in mind (usually we don't reflect upon it) is this: that events in life are not isolated detached episodes, each standing like milestones conspicuously apart on our road through life. They are rather the lakes and waterfalls which diversify without checking the onward flow of the river of life. They are

integral parts of one and the same river: the cascade with all its rush and foam only leads to smooth water a little further away where the river is flowing placidly, though hidden for the moment from our eye by the mist rising from the headlong leaping waters at our feet. Hidden from us, but his vision reaches further over and beyond the concealing mist. We see the turmoil, He also sees the calm beyond. At all times He sees afar off, while our limited vision is restricted to the turmoil at our feet. We forget that our eye takes in only our immediate neighbourhood. We are often too immersed in the happenings in our neighbourhood to look away, or to realize that He sees not our vision only, but His far larger and grander outlook, veiled from us for the moment by the encircling mist.

Thomas the Apostle is not often brought into prominence, but on this occasion he seems to have spoken with unusual forwardness. They all saw that their words fell on deaf ears, that His mind was made up, and that nothing they could say would make Him falter in His purpose. How much time and other things are saved by the man who does not let "I will" wait upon "I won't"!

His mind being made up, they had to make up theirs also. What were they to do? Leave Him or follow Him? They had enough manliness to hesitate about leaving Him because of danger, and yet—the danger ahead was real.

Then Thomas stepped forward, and his impulsive words turned the hesitating balance. Danger of death! For him, certainly: then let "us go and die with Him." Impulsive words, but really and truly meant just then. So the Apostles made up their minds that they would follow, and Our LORD silently stored up the impulsive words in His heart. They were not forgotten; and when, not so many days afterwards, this same Thomas stood aloof from the other disciples and refused them credence, and just a touch of superiority showing in him, laid down his own conditions of belief, to the surprise of all, his challenge is accepted. The risen CHRIST takes Thomas at his word. Why? Will He take anyone else at their word also? Hardly; but He had not forgotten that it was this same Thomas who once had said, "Let us also go and die with Him." He had said it, and, what is more, he had meant it. Such a good intention, shall it go without due reward? Assuredly not; and when the fullness of time arrives it will bring with it the recompense of many a forgotten good intention: one not always carried out, but good and real at the moment. Afterwards it may have been forgotten by us, but it was not forgotten by Him. They were not to die with Him then; later on, though, many would meet a violent death for His sake. If their resolutions were half-hearted now, still, at the fitting moment, right willingly did they lay down their lives.

6. The natural result of Our LORD's tarrying four days after He had received the bad news was that when He did come He was too late. Lazarus was already dead. This is how we read it without thinking, but when we come to think, we see it must be read quite differently. Too late for *our* purpose, but just at the right moment for *His*. We get so completely absorbed in our own interests that we at times utterly forget that GOD has interests in these very same things, interests which are necessarily higher, and to which our lesser plans must dutifully give place. When these collisions of interests occur, some rebel, grow frantic, and want to know why GOD the CREATOR does not accommodatingly accept their view and without delay carry out for them some one-sided plan of their own. Not formulated quite in these words, perhaps, but this is the gist of many grievances which men and women nurse against GOD. If they only would have patience, they would find out that GOD's way was the larger way, even if it did delay, yet in the end it proved the better way, and one to their own greater advantage. In this episode we have a typical case of collision of plans, though without intentional opposition, and the final result. Martha and Mary wanted one thing, CHRIST gave them another ; the gift which He gave was much the most worth having, even though His gift of years of joy involved the endurance of hours of sorrow. Also, it must be

noticed that though CHRIST gave in His own way, yet He did give what they wanted ; they wanted their brother's health and life, and CHRIST gave him life and health.

A man's character is something which in the main changes very little. Even the friendship of Our LORD does not quite re-make a character, though, of course, it elevates and improves it. Still, with much improvement, much also that is merely natural is left alone. We are not quite transfigured in this life ; that is left for the life to come. Quite irrationally, some people are surprised if the Christian convert occasionally shows traces of the original pagan. Christianity will not improve out of recognition the physical man ; the moral man it will ; yet a man's health and strength, his eyesight and his artistic aptitudes, remain much as they were, though usually benefited by the moral improvement effected in him. So Martha was still the busy Martha and Mary the prey of her deep emotions, too deep for expression in words. When Martha heard of the arrival of CHRIST, she rose at once and speedily went forward to meet Him. In disconsolate silence Mary sat at home, listless and sick at heart with her absorbing sorrow. Such differences of character exist, and are meant to exist ; our LORD accepted them, so must we. If CHRIST Himself did not insist on one uniform character, neither should mankind. If this is true of character, much more is it true of forms of devotion. Some

devotions make no appeal except to one type of mind. Where in things of moment Our LORD allows such large liberty, in things of lesser moment it is not for us to curtail liberty, but to respect it.

7. Martha is an early exponent of a mode of thinking which still half unconsciously lives on in the minds of many Christians. Things happen, it appears to them, in the absence of Our LORD. Not, of course, His bodily absence, but a temporary punitive absence of His special grace. No doubt there must be cases when extra grace is withdrawn because of some wilful unworthiness. But this is not so universally true that it can always be presupposed without much searching of heart and conscience.

"LORD," said Martha, "if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." So this is the explanation of untoward events. It may be sometimes ; sometimes, as in the case before us, it is as wrong as possible. His presence or His absence is an element outside the case. So CHRIST combats this idea of Martha to point out once for all that His bodily presence does not arrest the natural working of physical laws. Not by His presence nor by His saving grace will their automatic action be stayed. His bodily presence in the sick chamber would not of itself have checked the natural course of the fever ; the exercise of His divine power had no need of His actual and visible presence. In the

preoccupation of her sisterly grief this elementary theology was overlooked by Martha. And there are many Marthas nowadays who have not Martha's excuse.

"If Thou hadst been here." A perfectly erroneous thought, because CHRIST, being GOD, is everywhere by His power, and, when He so wills, acts independently of time and place. This necessary consequence of the possession of divine power had not occurred to the sorrowing mind of much-serving Martha. It is a most necessary reflection for us also, and we are indebted to Martha's words as the occasion which provides us with this emphatic lesson.

8. Meanwhile Lazarus was dead and his sisters inconsolable. Our LORD did not try to console them with words of ordinary sympathy; His consolation was to draw Martha's attention away from the present and make her dwell on the great future. "Thy brother shall rise again." But this did not comfort her; she knew that already. "Yes, LORD, I know that he shall rise again at the last day." Yet her faith in the reunion of that great but far-distant day did not assuage her grief at the present day's tragedy. Faith and natural emotions move in different planes; the lines along which each travels do not intersect, though they may lead to the same end. So often enough we find that supernatural faith brings no immediate assuagement of natural grief. Nature is to have its own way in this for the moment, and CHRIST deals

tenderly with nature in its times of sorrowing. He does more: He shares the sorrow, and what He Himself has experienced He respects in us.

With her own grief only partially allayed, Martha thinks of her sister. Most likely Our LORD asked for Mary, as we find Martha saying to her sister that "the Master has come and calleth for thee." To a nature like Mary's this spontaneous message from Him was the first ray of comforting light which had lit up her utter darkness. He called for her. The mere echo of His comforting voice breaks the gloom which encircled her. Listlessness vanishes. "As soon as she heard, she riseth quickly and cometh to Him." The call of CHRIST, the word of CHRIST to the individual, no matter by what means communicated, stirs up to activity and infuses new life. She rose, and rose quickly—a word added by the Evangelist, not without point—and made her way to him speedily.

9. The sight of CHRIST standing there recalled memories, and she fell naturally into her old position at His feet. She took her favourite place almost without thought, as her mind was as the mind of her sister, and her uppermost thought found expression in Martha's words: "Lord, if only Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Her affectionate nature had been stirred to its depths; not even Our LORD's own presence could overshadow her grief at the loss of one so dear. And what did CHRIST think, when He saw, as we must see,

that, though kneeling at His feet, her thoughts were with her lost brother? Did He think that her sisterly love and grief and consequent distraction showed any disloyalty to Himself? Did He hold that love of Himself was to extinguish utterly every other loving instinct implanted by Himself in the human heart? The Evangelist tells us what He did, and His action speaks louder and clearer than any words. "JESUS therefore, when He saw her weeping, . . . groaned in spirit and troubled Himself." Could deep sympathy be better expressed? At the sight of her grief, He said no word, but he troubled Himself, and when He beheld the tears welling from her eyes He wept himself. "And JESUS wept." The shortest verse in any New Testament chapter, but not the least moving. With masterly tact, the Evangelist sets down the fact alone and adds no comment. Nor can we, for this is a fact for the heart to ponder over in reverent silence; it is a thought too full for expression in words, and where words would sound weak and commonplace.

10. Many Jews, friends and acquaintances from Jerusalem had come with kindly intent to comfort the sisters; they had followed Mary in her hurried exit, and were witnesses of CHRIST'S manifest grief. Some who saw it said, "Behold how He loved him!" And they were right. He did love His friend Lazarus, loved him living and loved him dead. But if He loved him, why did He let him die? A most natural question

for the Jews to ask. It would have been a foolish question if asked of any other man. But why did this Man let His friend die? "Could not He that opened the eyes of the man born blind have caused that this man should not die?" They asked a most pertinent question, for He had proved that He possessed superhuman powers: why, then, did He not exert them for one He loved so much? He had no special love for the blind man, yet He gave him freely the priceless gift of sight; but this man—He left him to his fate; He let him die.

Could He not have stayed the hand of death? Most certainly He could. Indeed, does it not seem an easier task to stay the hand of death than to unclasp that hand when it had once closed its fatal grip? He who could do, who did do, the greater, why did He not do the less? A fair question, and one which Our Lord has answered by anticipation, as we shall see if we follow the narrative.

When they had all arrived at the sepulchre, "Jesus saith, Take away the stone"; and very naturally the practical Martha protested. In Eastern lands decomposition sets in quickly, and it seemed irrational to ask that the decomposing body of the one so much loved should be now exposed to human eyes. But if Martha knew this, why did it not occur to her that Christ knew it also? A plan of action which seems desirable to us under the aspect in which we see it clearly, surely that aspect must be

visible to CHRIST also? And if He arranges somewhat differently, it is not because He is unaware of our point of view; but He knows that, and something more. This we must always remember, and always trust Him. Martha, in her too natural anxiety, neither remembered nor at the moment trusted. So Our Lord gently reminds her of both these failings (and thus reminds us also) in words of kindly reproof: "Did I not say to thee that if thou believe thou shalt see the glory of GOD?"

11. We get so accustomed to the ordinary run of things that at times we do not take into account that He who made the laws of nature can also wield them to suit His own purposes, doing on a large scale just what we do on one much smaller: as when we utilize steam and electricity and make them move our weights and carry our messages. We do not interfere with existing laws when trains travel at sixty miles an hour, or when Marconigrams convey our words across the wide oceans. We apply our knowledge. CHRIST'S knowledge was indefinitely greater than ours; what more natural than that He should occasionally give evidence of this? He did it always in suitable circumstances, and for suitable reasons. Some things in nature GOD has reserved to Himself. For instance, the origin of life. And a summons from the tomb is equivalently the origination of a new temporal life, in succession to one which has already run its allotted mundane course.

No one but the Master of life can give life. It is, so to speak, His private property. Thus, in giving life once more to dead and buried Lazarus, CHRIST proves His divinity. But this proof postulates death, and its confirmation also requires the burial. A death might be doubtful, but the twofold fact of death and a public funeral leaves no logical loophole for doubt. Thus the death of Lazarus is made the vehicle of an all-important dogma: a dogma so important for all mankind that a kindly CHRIST could permit all the sorrows of the broken-hearted sisters, sorrows just for the time being, sorrows so soon to be swallowed up in overflowing joys if thereby the lesson could be adequately taught. And it was taught adequately.

12. Martha's protestations notwithstanding, the order that CHRIST gave was obeyed. The stone was taken away. Then there was a pause, silence and a tense expectation. The words of CHRIST fell on attentive ears. "FATHER, I know that Thou hearest Me always, but because of the people who stand about have I said it: that they believe that Thou hast sent Me." Now we know the reason why He had said, while yet beyond the Jordan, on receiving the sisters' message "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of GOD." It is to the glory of GOD that we should all believe that GOD had sent His CHRIST. It is to the glory of GOD that we believe in the divinity of CHRIST. It was that we

might believe in this divinity that He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hands and feet . . . and his face bound with a napkin. And JESUS said to them, Loose him and let him go."

There is only one who can speak with this loud voice, loud enough to call the dead back into life again. Only GOD can do the distinctive works of GOD. CHRIST does the works of GOD, and He appeals to these works as proofs of His mission. "The FATHER who abideth in Me, He doth the works. Believe you not that I am in the FATHER and the FATHER in Me? Otherwise believe for the very works' sake." (Jn. xiv. 19-21).

13. Who shall put into words the rush of unexpected happiness which came as a flood into the hearts of the sisters? Sorrow? Yes, they had just felt sorrow, but was not this joy worth all the sorrow they had endured? Would this joy have had half its joyousness if that sorrow had not gone before?

All this overwhelming joy had been present to the eye of CHRIST while He surveyed the whole course of these events as they slowly took shape from beginning to end. But the sisters saw only the pain of the passing moment. If He permits pain, it is because it is the threshold of beatitude. To use His own imagery, "A woman hath sorrow because her hour is come . . . but she remembereth no more the anguish for joy that a man is born." Most of the

ultimate joys sent by CHRIST are ushered in by sorrow. So did CHRIST do the work of GOD, and called Lazarus into life out of death. This was His work. There still remained some subsidiary and minor tasks—for men to do. What men can do for themselves CHRIST will not do for them. Why should He? Now He commands the men standing about to loosen the bands that had been wound round his limbs, and so give him the free use of limbs now strong with pulsing life.

14. Here was a public manifestation of power, and one would think that all who beheld would have been impressed and convinced. One can imagine a man of to-day saying, "Well, if I had seen with my own eyes, certainly I would have believed." So one might think. Yet of those who actually did see, what impression did they take away? "Many therefore of the Jews who were come to Mary and Martha, and had seen the things that JESUS did, believed in Him . . . but some went to the Pharisees."

And it has always been the same story. Some believe, and some go to the Pharisees. The works that CHRIST has done are enough, at any rate He considers that they are enough. More He will not give. If you are not satisfied by what there is to see, you are free to walk away and go and tell the hostile Pharisees.

"If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead." (Luc. xvi. 31.)

INSTRUCTION II

ON MAKING GOOD USE OF OUR FAULTS

ALMOST every spiritual book that you take up tells you either in so many words or with some circumlocution, that the life of a Christian is a continual struggle. Generally speaking we have found this out for ourselves long before we read of it in books. We hardly want books to reveal this fact to us; what we want books to do is to tell us how we are to deal with the failings we are sufficiently conscious we possess. We have to struggle with them, that we know, and also know that some of them seem to be born in us; without any conscious effort of ours to produce them we find them already part of ourselves. Others come and go, they arise from circumstances in our daily lives, and apparently depend upon these circumstances being within, or without, the range of our personal influence. If we really struggle, we find that we do make headway, our major defects at least tend to lessen in number and grievousness.

When we seem to have achieved some definite mastery over the more glaring defects in our characters, our short-lived satisfaction often fades away at the sight of other failings, smaller, but quite visible enough. The con-

tinued presence of these lesser imperfections is sadly depressing to some temperaments. Nor is much comfort derived from soothing assurances that such failings are permitted for ultimate perfection. It is true enough ; but not consoling ; it seems such a roundabout way of acquiring goodness, and if sanctification is the end, why should we not be permitted with the same natural facility to fall into virtues?

Speculation apart, it seems an established fact that in the process of sanctifying the soul of man, the presence of some defects (les défauts de nos qualités) as shadows cast by sunlight are useful if not absolutely necessary.

In the following remarks about faults it must be distinctly borne in mind that they apply strictly to faults, but not to wilful wrongdoing, which has another name. And the reader is supposed to be one whose aim is high ; not one of the easy going crowd who don't mind serving God up to a certain point, as long as this service is not too irksome, and does not make too great a demand upon their liberty of action. To such people another doctrine must be preached . . . quite another.

The present audience is taken to consist of men of good will. Now men, no matter how largely endowed with good will, remain men, and as men, are liable to human failings. Being of good will it is worth while to inquire, "But what is to be done with their faults?" There is one obvious answer: "They must be

eliminated," an answer as conclusive as it is obvious. And yet it only appears obvious, since practical experience of life leads to quite other conclusions. They won't be eliminated; numerically fewer perhaps, diminished, restricted, but quite eliminated—no. Like the Jebusites in the Promised Land, some always remain. Experience proves that they always endure as a permanent ingredient in the composition of our lives and—what is to be done with them?

First of all we admit the facts, and this beneficial consequence at once flows from the admission: that we should be more indulgent in our judgments of the faults of others. We can hardly exact from anyone else that finished all-round perfection which we find unattainable by our own steadiest efforts.

Leniency in our criticism of others, admirable as it is, is only the beginning of the good results which, strangely enough, emerge from the perception of our own personal shortcomings. Faults being so largely common property, we get plenty of opportunities of studying how they affect people, and then it dawns on us that the faults themselves do less harm than the unskilful use of these failings; so even our faults have a definite and well marked utility. One useful result is that our minds are made broader, that we realize that quite good people, while they remain "good," may still fall into many imperfections and not

forfeit their reasonable right to be classed as "good."

While men may have the very best of dispositions within themselves, there are three ever open sources of occasional lapses. No living being can escape these transient blemishes any more than a landscape can always bask in the sunshine with no passing shadow from a wandering cloud.

One fruitful cause of these minor imperfections is *Inadvertence*. To be constantly on the alert; to be so ever watchful as to see at one quick glance the various bearings of every word and action and instantly to select the wisest course, is indeed an imaginary counsel of perfection. Most men who are as a rule mentally alert, are yet subject to fitful obscurity of mind at odd moments, so that while pursuing one train of thought they quite omit to take due account of another view of the same situation, and make a false step accordingly. Then come the inconveniences of taking false steps, though taken quite unintentionally, and so not really blameworthy. But the step was false all the same, all blame is apportioned just the same, so while we get all the outward consequences of a moral shortcoming put before us, there is no real moral delinquency.

It is rather a humiliation for anyone to fall into such inadvertences; and the way in which people deal with such humiliations affords a real test of goodness. The really good

will sigh resignedly over the blunder, and accepting the humiliation with patient resignation, will go quietly on. But the less good those whose goodness is superficial, will rebel loudly at the unmerited blame ; they insist excitedly on the spotlessness of their unseen motives ; they raise so much ado about nothing that they produce an effect exactly opposite to their intention. The onlooker is inclined not so much to estimate the purity of unseen intentions, as to suspect that where there is so much smoke there must be some fire. The manner in which these faults are variously dealt with, furnishes a touchstone for differentiating genuine virtue from merely superficial veneer.

It is a great advantage to have the means of disentangling the real from the sham ; the fault, granting that it really is a fault, amply compensates for its faultiness by giving us this easy test for separating the true from the spurious. So this is a good and distinctly useful purpose why and wherefore such faults may be permitted to exist.

Another source is character, especially impulsive character. A man's character is very composite, for it includes his inborn inclinations, all that he may have derived from a remote ancestry ; he himself is the first to be surprised at many aspects of his own personality, which he had first to learn, and then to govern, to use, to check and, if he can, to elimi-

nate. Perceptions and emotions vary very much in individuals, but quick perceptions, ready emotions, a tendency to rapid translations of thought into action, by mere rapidity alone, easily leads to mistakes and failings. The slow thinking, slow moving man, while he is leisurely evolving his own lagging conclusions, little guesses at the seething turmoil which rages within the impulsive man who is waiting for his answer. What wonder if the man with his nerves on edge finds his impulses too effervescing, too volcanic to control, and discovers that he is already responsible for a regrettable incident before he is quite aware that he has acted at all! This is how we get something with all the outward clothing of a fault, but the inward malice, which alone brings the stain of sin with it, is completely absent. It looked like a fault, it may be that it has to be reprehended as one; here again the good man accepts the confusion his public conduct has earned for him, and his patience under misapprehension more than compensates for the spontaneous combustion which makes him, though innocent, bear all the guilt of wilful fire raising. It is not the beginner in the way of perfection who can silently endure the blame of such mistakes, knowing in his heart that he is guiltless of any real moral fault.

The third source of failings is much more widespread than inadvertence or impulse.

We are all liable to much imperfection, from the sheer weakness of human nature. Inherent weakness is in all that is human. Forgetfulness of this weakness is disastrous, hence the Apostle's warning, "He that thinketh himself to stand let him take heed lest he fall." Not the least dangers come from this, that few have fully explored the weak points of their individual temperaments. There is so much about ourselves which we don't know, don't even suspect till we most unexpectedly light upon it. Our occasional studies in the pursuit of our predominant passion and the application of the "particular examen" to some details remedies a good deal. Still, granting all the unforeseen, situations are apt to make sudden revelations to us, and to throw light into recesses of our nature hitherto unexplored because we are quite unconscious of their very existence. Falling into a fault wakes us up rudely to this useful discovery. Perhaps nothing save the actual fall opens our eyes to these unexpected frailties dormant hitherto from the absence of any suitable stimulus, dormant but there.

We may take it that there are useful consequences to be derived from the presence of failings, utility enough to account for their presence even in the lives of such as are certainly serving God. The furtherance of self-knowledge and the promotion of humility are two results which even taken by them-

selves are reason enough why imperfection such as we are now dealing with may be allowed to co-exist with deep seated love of God and a real devotion to His service.

What a field for thought, plans, resolutions, purposes of amendment, lies open to those who meditate, when they become conscious that they have lapsed into such imperfections.

It not unfrequently happens that when thinking over falls like these, falls from a high standard of conduct, some are at first sight astonished that they, of all people, should have yielded to such weaknesses. The sight of these faults troubles them, they swell with a just indignation against themselves, and feel fired with a righteous anger. If they feel this, and also feel strongly how much better they are going to be soon, well, it may enlighten them (though the light may not at first bring much comfort), when they are told that all this is chiefly self love, and not anything virtuous at all.

The discovery of faults in ourselves ought not to make us lose our peace of mind; faults should not surprise us; but we may legitimately be surprised when we find any real virtues. For is not human nature sadly imperfect, even in its best representatives? What wonder then if we fall occasionally? The wonder really would be the other way about, if a fault really could not be found.

The discovery in ourselves of some hitherto

hidden imperfection should not rob us of our tranquillity of soul. If we do lose tranquillity of mind, it rather argues that we did not know ourselves, and that we are sadly wanting in real humility. It is self-love which makes us grieve too much about our faults, the self-love which springs generally from a too sensitive nature, or from the anger which we feel on discovering that we were so much less perfect than we had taken for granted. The real truth is unpalatable; perhaps half unconsciously we had been paying complacent court to an idol, and the idol has fallen with an unexpected crash, and left exposed a very bare place indeed. Hence these bitter tears of mortification, as much as of genuine repentance.

Now the discovery of failings must on no account lead to any discouragement. Discouragement is not the object for which they were brought to our notice; it should rather be a reason for encouragement when more imperfections come within the range of our mental vision, for it frequently means the presence of additional spiritual light. A room seems quite free from dust as long as it is lit by ordinary daylight; but let a beam of strong sunlight stream into the room, and the sunlit beam seems solid with floating particles. The beam of sunshine does not make these particles; they were there all the time; but without the intensified light, their very presence was unsuspected. So it is with faults. They are all

about in plenty, but we have not sufficient light to make them visible to us ; the room has not become more dusty, but the light has increased.

The presence of faults is not incompatible with the presence, also, of God's grace. We may go further: experience shows that some failings are left even in souls that are holy, to retain humility ; to keep them alive to their natural weaknesses ; to form a stimulus to increased effort ; and that they may be guarded against the great dangers that spring from pride, self-satisfaction, and an imperfect knowledge of oneself. The imperfections which exist, exist to be the occasion of many virtues. A painter and a sculptor learn much from the imperfections of their early work. So does the man who takes his spiritual life seriously. Moreover, there is this special point to be considered. The faults were committed inadvertently, on the thoughtless impulse of the moment ; that is to say, with the minimum of volition. On the other hand, the subsequent reparation was deliberate. In order to repair the faults, meditation, acts of faith, hope, charity, humility, and other virtues, were called into activity. The positive in these cases much outweighs the negative.

Provided we make some good use of our faults, as God evidently intended that we should do, then we see why, in His wisdom, He permits them. They are stones of offence

indeed, strewn about our pathway ; we may from time to time strike our foot against them, the experience is painful momentarily, but it is not mortal, and it warns us to walk in future, with our eyes well open, and to keep carefully to the pathways that are straight.

MEDITATION VII

GETHSEMANE AND SORROW

Matthew xxvi. 30-46

"And a hymn being said, they went out unto Mount Olivet. Then Jesus said to them: All you shall be scandalized in Me this night. For it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be dispersed. But after I be risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. And Peter answering, said to Him: Although all shall be scandalized in Thee, I will never be scandalized! Jesus said to him: Amen I say to thee, that in this night before the cock crow, thou wilt deny me thrice. Peter saith to Him: Yea, though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee. And in like manner said all the disciples. Then Jesus came with them into a country place which is called Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples: Sit you here till I go yonder and pray. And taking Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him, he began to grow sorrowful and to be sad. Then He saith to them: My soul is sorrowful even unto death; stay you here and watch with Me. And going a little further, He fell upon His face, praying and saying: My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass

from me. Nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt. And He cometh to His disciples, and findeth them asleep, and he saith to Peter: What? could you not watch one hour with Me? Watch ye and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh weak. Again the second time, He went and prayed, saying, My Father, if this chalice may not pass away, but I must drink it, Thy will be done. And he cometh again, and findeth them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And leaving them, He went again, and He prayed the third time, saying the self same word. Then He cometh to His disciples and sayeth to them, Sleep ye now, and take your rest; behold the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise; let us go; behold he is at hand that shall betray Me."

WE speak of the mystery of pain. Other things in life are equally mysterious, but they come into our lives only at varying periods, and then they merely touch the surface, and do not, like pain, dig deep into our sensitive nature. Pain affects more than our physical sensibilities; often it harrows the imagination more than our nervous system; pain chills by anticipation and by retrospection as well as by actuality.

Like so many problems in physical life, this one, too, is enveloped in obscurity; yet it

is not in such complete darkness that we cannot perceive reasons and uses for physical pain; up to a certain point we can see that it is both salutary and preservative. Unless smartly given, some lessons in life pass unheeded. The momentary pain which a young animal encounters in its aimless gambollings may instil a caution which will preserve, in some future day, its very life and race. So the mystery is not all mysterious, but is mysterious sometimes because we usually confine all our attention to the event of the moment, and take but little heed of future valuable effects.

2. Without undervaluing the pains endured by our physical body, there is another form of suffering which is still harder to bear. Extreme as bodily suffering may be, and sometimes is, there is a kind of pain yet more extreme, and this is, the anguish which may fill the heart and soul while the body may be but feebly sympathetic. When really extreme, bodily pain brings insensibility from the very extremity of torture; mental suffering unhinges the mind, and if extremity may be said to bring relief, it is the relief of insanity. Physical suffering appeals to the eye; the capacity for mental torture to arrest attention is much more limited. Yet the pain hidden away and unseen in the depths of a man's soul is far the hardest to bear.

In some shape or other pain enters into the life of every one; mankind can no more escape

pain than it can live without food, and, like food, some may require more pain and some less.

It is a fact that all mankind does encounter pain, and this leads us to ask, "Did He who was the CHRIST of GOD, did He lead a charmed life, or did He become like to us also in this?"

The Crucifix is a permanent and sufficient answer.

3. If in His coming He would appeal broadly to men, there would be no use in His living a charmed life. There would be no encouragement in a life where all the thorns were plucked out of the crown of suffering. We are not touched by the prosperity of others; envious, we may be and angry, wildly dissatisfied at the sight of the gilded lives of some which are in such glaring contrast with the want and misery and hunger and incessant toil, which fall to the lot of others. Such contrasts may stir up indignation, but will not set vibrating the kindly chords of human nature which make the whole world kin. In men above the level of the savage, there is one thing which readily evokes sympathy, and that is suffering.

So He had to suffer. He recognized this Himself, and impressed it upon His disciples in memorable words, spoken to the wavering disciples with whom He walked to Emmaus on the first Easter day. "O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets have spoken! Ought not CHRIST to have suf-

fered these things?" (Luc. xxiv. 25-26). So with due proportion it must be said of every Christian, as it was said of CHRIST Himself, "Ought He not to suffer?" With due proportion for most of us are not asked to suffer the rack or the thumb screw, the scourge or the cross. What then? For most men their suffering lies in the right discharge of their daily duty. This is not so devoid of genuine suffering as the unthinking may imagine.

4. There is another consideration as to the value of suffering which must not be overlooked. The bonds of love and sympathy which bind mankind together are indispensable for human welfare. But these bonds must be real, and they must be true. Being a foundation on which so much is built, we must be sure of the solidity of that foundation. For this security we must have an assured test. Now the real test of love is suffering. The answer to the question: "How much are you prepared to endure for the sake of those you love?" will give the just measure of love staunch and true, or the reverse. Not words, not impetuous declarations and eloquent sighs and tears; these may be theatricalities; highly-coloured robes which will serve well enough in the limelight, but are woefully dingy when seen in the clear light of day.

Suffering is the one safe test of love. It is the test proposed by CHRIST Himself, He who knew

the human heart so well, so very well. "Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?" He asks of those who sit at His right hand. (Matt. xx. 22.) Who so well as He knew the full bitterness of that chalice to which even He would not have put his lips had not the chalice been proffered by the hand of His FATHER. "The chalice which My FATHER has given Me, shall I not drink it?" For the love He bore His FATHER He drank the unwelcome cup to the dregs. But it was love which nerved Him (speaking humanly, and for our instruction), to endure the test against which He prayed with such lowly submission. "FATHER, if Thou wilt, remove this chalice from Me, yet not My will, but Thine be done." (Luc. xxii. 42.) That CHRIST should love His FATHER is a truth which we accept at once: that CHRIST should love us, being mostly what we are, is another truth not so easy of persuasion. We need some proof of this. It seems heartless to demand such proof, yet CHRIST Himself has forestalled our demand, and as an irrefutable answer He endured Gethsemane as well as Calvary.

5. Let us recall to our minds the incidents which led to the long prayer, and that lonely night vigil under the grey-leaved olive trees in the garden on Mount Olivet.

They had left the upper chamber where CHRIST had washed the feet of His disciples, and had instituted the Eucharist. They had

come out of the lighted room into the dark of the night, and the gloom all around them seemed to harmonize with the oppression of spirit which weighed vaguely on each and all of them. The words He spoke by the way did not relieve their gloom. CHRIST would have us realize fully the meaning of that last walk which He took as a free man. In His humanity He knew and felt that the shadow of the end was already cast about Him. Yet His thought was not fixed on Himself ; He was thinking of them. "All you shall be scandalized in Me this night." All you—all, no one excepted. He had been more than kind to them ; He had raised them above their original condition ; He had given them power to heal the sick and to cast out devils ; they had had the privilege of His constant companionship for three years, and now, what is their return? "This night . . . all you . . . shall fail me." Surely a bitter thought for any human heart to carry within it when taking the last earthly journey! Yet His thought is not bitter ; He does mention it, but He glosses it over by foretelling their future meeting in Galilee. "I will go before you into Galilee." No bitterness and no reproach, though He had abundant reason to reproach them bitterly. All He does now is to call marked attention to what will afterwards give them comfort when, with bitterness of spirit, they will come to realize their baseness on this night.

6. But there was one who would not let himself tamely be brought down to the common level. All of them? All but one, for he certainly would be the brilliant exception. He thought so, and he said so ; quite honestly, for at that time Peter hardly knew himself as he really was. How many of us share this ignorance of Peter? His future prominence made it needful that in good time his eyes should be opened with unsparing effectiveness, to the unveiled truth. The shadow which he felt on himself did not prevent CHRIST thinking out the way in which this salutary lesson should be forcefully impressed on Peter ; how thoughtful He ever was for others, He who at that time seemed to have need of thought for Himself!

The quick impulsive nature of Peter had been stung by his own inclusion in the general condemnation. All! himself included! Never! "Although every one else here present may be scandalized in Thee . . . yet not I." It sounds like boastfulness, yet it was not; it was merely want of self knowledge, that knowledge of self in which most of us also are so generally wanting. So in the end he will meet with gentle treatment, but meanwhile, the lesson must be driven home. "You . . . you will be steadfast, you will stand while the rest fall? Why, this very night you ; yes you ; will deny me not once, but thrice!" Hard words, very hard, but very necessary and salutary, and CHRIST never shrinks from salutary sternness

when firmness is needed to correct and ameliorate those He loves. Hard words calling forth emphatic repudiation from Peter, for like the rest of us, he was inclined to believe his own feelings in preference to the warnings of others. And the other Apostles felt and spoke with Peter.

But though CHRIST, with clear insight, saw that it was necessary now to rebuke Peter in order to cure him of a fault that was on the surface, yet for all His hard words He never faltered in his affection for His imperfect follower. Impulsive Peter was by nature, timid he might prove to be, yet CHRIST knew that beneath such superficial imperfections the heart of Peter was true. His courage might evaporate when tested too suddenly, or when put to an unexpected strain ; but let the first surprise have time to pass, and the real man would come to himself not the worse, but the better, for his moment of cowardice and fright. So CHRIST will not punish him now for a fault as yet in the future ; He still shows Peter all the confidence He was wont to show him.

From what is recorded in the Gospels we find that CHRIST was usually very reticent as to His own inmost feelings. Yet He had become Man that He might experience human woes in our humanity. At times we get a passing glimpse of what was stirring beneath the veil ; as when the hurrying clouds are torn

asunder for the moment by sudden gusts of wind, and show the blue sky they are hiding from our sight. He spoke calmly as was His wont to His disciples, saying what no doubt He had often said before, when He went off to pray alone, "Sit you here while I go yonder and pray." Leaving the little knot of disciples, He takes Peter, the somewhat crestfallen Peter, together with the two sons of Zebedee, and goes with them into the shadows beyond.

7. Nothing is more wonderful in the portraiture of CHRIST than His equable bearing under all circumstances. But this evenness of outward demeanour did not spring from insensibility or impassibility. Given the occasion, His outraged sense of justice or duty would find spontaneous expression. He did not hesitate to denounce the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in scathing words; He did not hesitate to drive out the buyers and sellers from the Temple precincts with a strong arm. These were public duties; but for Himself He seldom let the emotions of His own heart appear. Not that He always kept them veiled from sight, but He was chary as to when and before whom He manifested any feeling that was stirring within Him; and He so seldom complained. But now, walking towards the dark shadows of the olive grove in the company of His chosen three, it seemed as if He would no longer keep His emotions to Himself; He would speak of Himself. And how else should we know the

depths of anguish making their home in His very heart? CHRIST'S words are never merely rhetorical, never spoken merely for effect, all His utterances are as simple as is consistent with clearness. So the unwonted words He uses now should fall on our ears with added weight. Just a few words, but think of their depth of meaning! "My soul is sorrowful even unto death." It was not ordinary sorrow that CHRIST would express in such terms. "My soul is sorrowful." My soul pervades My whole being, so that sorrow of soul means an all pervading sorrow reaching as far as the soul itself, leaving no part of man unaffected. How could an all pervading sorrow be more adequately expressed! My soul is myself, my whole self, none of myself excepted. CHRIST would have us realize that He was not simply experiencing a sense of sorrow, but that He was permeated by it. He allowed sorrow so burdensome to come upon Him so burdensome and so exhausting, that he felt it was crushing the human life out of Him, "sorrowful unto death!"

8. But why was it that He, of all mankind, should experience sorrow such as this sorrow? So many questions rise in our minds when we think over what CHRIST must have endured before He lets such expressions pass His lips. Why suffer at all? Was there any compelling necessity? Certainly there was not, any action, no matter how trivial in itself, was still the

action of the God-man, and being the action of a Divine Person, was of incalculable value. That He should endure this, makes His endurance all the more wonderful, because it was so entirely voluntary. This deepens one mystery while it half reveals another.

We cannot think about this human suffering without wanting to know the reason of it. Reasons, no doubt, are many, and amongst them this seems evident, that He would give a proof of the depth and sincerity of His love for mankind. A man may live for another; better still, a man may die for another, and here we reach the extremity of devotion and love; he is our authority that, no man can give greater proof of love than to lay down his life for his friend.

That He chose to die actuated by this motive is a thought worthy of much consideration. Christ was a free agent. No one could take His life from Him. This he tells in so many words. "Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life" (Jn. x. 17). *I* lay down My life for, "No man taketh it from Me." (Jn. x. 18.) He impresses on us the fact that He is the master of His own life, saying in this same passage, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." This power was His, this twofold power; and He exercised the power in its twofold capacity by His death and resurrection.

His death, and the manner of His death, was

left to His own choice, "*If* I be lifted up from earth I will draw all things to myself." (Jn. xii. 32.) The element of uncertainty introduced by the word "if" sufficiently expresses His freedom in this matter. And the word is used advisedly, for St John explains at once, "Now this He said signifying what death He would die."

9. Since no one could force death upon Him, it remains for us to conclude that His death was a voluntary sacrifice, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews points out ". . . the blood of CHRIST who by the HOLY GHOST offered Himself unspotted unto GOD." (Heb. ix. 14.) These words bring out the spontaneity of the offering and its sanctity "by the HOLY GHOST" that is by divine inspiration.

Being so free, why did He deliberately choose suffering and death? Where there could be no outward pressure, where there also must be some rational motive, we are left to conclude that the impelling force was from within. He Himself supplied the motive; and what was this motive? We can think of one and only one of sufficient strength, and that one is the motive of love.

10. Here, as in many other matters, we are tied by the limitations of human ideas and human speech. We must translate everything into human words, as we have no other medium wherewith to clothe ideas except in those symbols we call words. That our words often

are, often must be, inadequate is self evident. Yet inadequate as they confessedly are, they are sufficient for practical life. Thus while we cannot gauge the *depths* of a CREATOR's love for the intelligent creatures which have sprung into existence at His creative word, yet by analogies we can quite grasp the *fact* of the existence of that love, though we may not fathom it in all its dimensions.

Now CHRIST would bring home to us the fact of creative love, and so He chose suffering and death as the means whereby to bring that fact home to us. "But I, if I be lifted up, will draw all things to Myself." What need had he, the all-powerful CREATOR, to draw all things when He has abundant compelling force, if He would choose to exert force? But He will not use force with man, as He made man free, and GOD cannot care to be served by automatic machinery. Above all things He wants free service; and if He strews our pathway in life with obstacles, it is that we may prove our freedom by selecting our own way through them. Free service is that given for love; GOD wants this free service given from the motive of love. Love cannot be forced, but it can be attracted; nothing attracts love like love itself. St John puts this truth clearly before us when, in his first Epistle, he says, "Let us therefore love GOD because *God first hath loved us.*" (1 Jn. vi. 19.) But this seems too good, too great for such small

creatures like ourselves to accept readily. So, as a convincing proof CHRIST chose His sufferings.

This great proof may be somewhat enhanced by added circumstances making death itself harder to bear. CHRIST would not shrink from this superfluous proof; so He faces the accumulated anguish of the mind as well as torture of body; he would ask no follower of His to face what He had not Himself faced first.

When He was enduring physical torment on the cross He was silent; He spoke for others, asking forgiveness for them; He spoke words of consolation to His mother and to His beloved disciple, but, save for one significant word, "I thirst," He made no complaint, and sought no sympathy. But in Gethsemane, though he sought solitude, He also, for our example, asked for sympathy and companionship. "Stay here and watch with Me," He said to the favoured three. So they sat them down and stayed and . . . watching by night in the gloom even at the bedside of one much loved, after a day of strong emotions, is wearying and exhausting. What wonder that they dozed and slept! It may seem remarkable that He who endured so much should seem to show some desire for feeble human sympathy and companionship? But for our instruction, He would justify that same longing for sympathy which He has placed in the heart of suffering man.

11. CHRIST was not a stoic, for stoicism is no part of Christianity. That He neither taught nor practised. He endured, feeling the full weight of what He endured, yet he went on enduring. He had other reasons for this endurance, for He wished both to share our lot and give us examples ; in the garden that night He suffered the suffering of solitariness ; He was purposely alone with His suffering ; He would know by His own actual experience how much solitude adds to sorrow. The kindly voice and the sympathetic touch, the presence unseen —but felt—of one ministering about, may not quench our pain, but how it soothes and braces up, and heartens to endure! Would He have had this human alleviation when He asked the three to "stay and watch with Me"? If the human nature that was His would have appreciated the kindly sympathy with Him which the disciples might have shown, just as we should have had similar appreciation in similar circumstances, yet He did not meet with sympathy. How many were to look for some solace in affliction, at least from their most trusted friends, and fail miserably in their expectation? How many would sadly echo His words of disappointment, "What? could *you* not watch one hour with me?" He would not spare Himself that bitter pang which comes from hope made void.

He went away, to be with His anguish of heart once more alone, to seek support from

One who never fails, who in His own time will send succour to a stricken soul. "My FATHER, if it be possible!" What a strange phrase for Him to use! With GOD, are not all things possible? Could it be that the FATHER had not the power to take the chalice away from the lips that shrank from it? Power, yes, He had the *power*; but He had not the *will*. "Nevertheless, not *as I will*, but as *Thou*." The power He had; but the FATHER so loved the world that He gave His only begotten SON, He gave Him as proof of the love of GOD for man, and having given Him, the gift would not be taken back.

12. He prayed, a prayer that rose from a sad heart clothed in all that should win acceptance. He prayed, and for a long time, a prayer that deserved to be granted in the exact terms in which it was formulated.

Again He went to His disciples, only to find them still sleeping heavily. He is not unmindful of their natural weakness, and sad as He is Himself, He readily made excuse for them. "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." What a world of explanation is contained in this phrase coined on such a sad experience by His gentle heart! Not only for those disciples, lying under the olive trees, sleepy and ashamed, but for others, men and women, equally disciples and equally inattentive, equally at fault and equally ashamed of themselves. For CHRIST'S formula was a general one,

as suitable to-day as when it was first spoken in the gloom of Gethsemane. It is full of consolation to us when we recall it, as it was to the disconsolate disciples when they took heart as it came back to their recollection, like a sunlit spot in their memory, all the brighter for the encircling shadows.

He said words of consolation to them, but He Himself would not rest, there could be no rest for His soul in its extremity of sadness in the mere presence of the heavy-eyed three; He went back into the deep shadows once more to pray the "selfsame prayer." How often we grow tired when some petition of ours is not answered in what we consider reasonable time. Most of us would think an hour rather a long time for a prayer, even of petition. CHRIST did not think like this, but was patient and submissive with beautiful resignation to His FATHER'S good pleasure; in His agony of mind He "prayed the longer." We get tired; we give up; we will not model our petitions on His. What wonder then that we achieve such poor results! Why do we forget that CHRIST Himself prayed, and even His prayer (for our instruction) was not granted immediately, "and being in an agony He prayed the longer."

13. One not uncommon quality of grief is its self-absorbing, its self-centred intensity. One in great sorrow often enough has no thought for others, and we have to make

excuses. CHRIST'S sorrow was absorbing enough, yet He kept His friends in mind, He went time and again to see how it fared with them. In spite of His words they could not watch, "for their eyes were heavy," and asleep He left them, for the lesson He had to teach had now been taught; He leaves them undisturbed while He goes back into darkness and desolation of heart. His patient perseverance meets with its reward; the answer to prayer comes. Not quite the answer He had directly prayed for, but the answer He had directly accepted when He had said, "not My will, but Thine." He has now given us an example: His prayer is the channel whereby strength is conveyed to Him to carry out the will not primarily His own. Again, why do we so little appreciate this example of GOD'S way of answering prayer? We pray for escape: He gives us strength manfully to go through our trial.

14. If we consider a little, may not His be, after all, really the better way? May it not serve more purposes than one, and all of them good? What force of character, what strength of will, what real manliness would result if by simple praying we could shirk all that was unpalatable and unpleasant? We are weak enough as it is; but then, should we not become nerveless, timid, shrinking, feeble-willed folk, unfit for the battles of life, unfit for that kingdom of Heaven which suffers violence, so that only the duly bold can attain to it.

We should be useless both for GOD'S purposes and for most of our own, if we never had to breathe the bracing atmosphere of the struggle which comes from meeting and bearing with human sorrow. Without sorrow in this world human sympathy would dwindle and die out for want of nourishment to keep it alive. Here, then, are some of the lessons taught us by CHRIST when He suffered in solitude and silence that night before His death on Calvary.

This phase of His life was now ended; the hour had struck. He rose from His prayer strong enough to meet what was still before Him. And now His disciples were ready also, at least, they were awake at last. "Come," He said, "rise, let us go, behold he is at hand that shall betray Me." He willingly accepts as His own, the destiny chosen for Him, "as Thou wilt."

15. There is much in the lives of all men that is chosen for them, and like CHRIST, their duty is to acquiesce. It is better so, at any rate, in many of the things that concern us most intimately we are given no choice; who shall be our parents; the social station in which we shall be born; our native abilities, and so on. Somehow, all is good for us; these are the instruments with which we are to do our work in life; we must not quarrel with our tools, but learn to use them skilfully.

We cannot easily exhaust all the instruction which a Christian may gather when contemplating CHRIST'S lonely vigil and mental pain

that night beneath the old olive trees of Gethsemane. His mental sufferings come before us first, for though in one way they were continued all through His passion, later on we are led to think more of what He is visibly enduring in His physical body. Why put the mental before us first? Perhaps because they were the more exhausting, and with wise economy, for there was a limit to be set even to His endurance, He chose to undergo the more arduous while as yet His bodily strength was less exhausted. Also to teach that a mind resigned can bear a physical strain such as would unhinge a mind in revolt. Then too we see Him, as it were, faltering under the very anticipation of what, after His prayer, He endured without a murmur. We see Him seek strength and find it in prayer. What wonder if we shrink from anticipating pain? But we, too, must pray. Pray with submission, accepting, as one less wise, the decision of Infinite Wisdom. We may certainly make known our petition, when offering up our prayer, and the answer, most likely, will be not the acceptance of our view, but the nerve and fortitude to walk successfully the pathway chosen for us. Remembering, that if it be chosen for us, it is chosen by one *so* perfect in knowledge. The FATHER would not give up His will at the wish expressed in such a perfect prayer by His own SON. The SON asks for escape, that the cup may be removed untasted from His unwilling lips; it

was not removed, but additional strength was given to enable Him to drink it up, to drink every drop. Why did He seem unwilling? Yet how otherwise could *we* realize the awful bitterness of a cup, unless we could see that even He was unwilling to taste it?

16. And now, what shall we think of the mystery of suffering? What light is shed on this mystery by CHRIST'S willing acceptance of unwelcome pain? That CHRIST was willing to experience pain, not for His own ultimate benefit, for He needed none, but for our instruction, is a supreme proof of the depth and reality of His love for mankind. We may not grasp this at first, but it is a truth which grows with thought, and we should go on thinking. But His suffering is more than this proof. In some way, perhaps at present obscure, perhaps beyond the limitations of our understanding, suffering is very good for men. We are rather unwilling to admit this; most men combat the idea; they think they know better. Yet, with the proof given at Gethsemane, no Christian can do otherwise than accept the conclusion reached by the author of the Imitation: "If there had been anything better than suffering for the welfare of mankind, then certainly CHRIST would have shown it to us both by word and example."

Accepting the principle that CHRIST, being what He is, would have shown us the very best, then ask, What has He shown? He has shown us Gethsemane.

MEDITATION VIII

THE NAMELESS THIEF

St Luke xxiii. 39-43

"And one of those robbers who were hanged, blasphemed Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying: Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done no evil. And he said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him: Amen I say unto thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise."

"REMEMBER me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom." This is a wish we can all echo when we think over Our Lord's ascension. Yet we might hesitate to say it, because there is something familiar about it; it sounds like the assured request made to an undoubted friend. Much as we would like to count ourselves amongst the assured friends of Christ, there is often some hesitation on our part. And yet, who was the friend who made this request and who was favoured with such a

generous reply? Certainly he was a friend, and we may see in him one type of man whom Our Lord also admitted to His friendship.

They say you can tell what a man is by the friends he makes and the kind of people he attracts. Friendship, to be quite perfect, requires a certain degree of equality, a certain similarity of tastes which usually comes from similarity of education and upbringing. And yet a real friendship may exist between those whose social level is unequal, a real friendship though both partners in such a friendship tacitly know their respective parts and preserve conventional limits. A friendship remains friendship even when circumstances will not allow such friends ever to become intimates.

2. What sort of friends were made by Our Lord, and what kind of characters did He attract?

Naturally, being who and what He was, He could not have as a friend one who was really His equal. All who came in contact with Him felt His superiority, and willingly acknowledged it. "The Master is come and calleth for thee" (Jn. xl. 28), said Martha to her sister Mary. He was the Master to them, yet all knew the fact which the Evangelist puts so plainly when he says, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary." In spite of this well-known affection for them, Mary and Martha ever felt their inferiority, but loved none the less on that account. Friendship is shown in befriending those

admitted into a charmed circle, even though there be an inner circle yet more exclusive. The Apostles were all friends of their LORD, yet not all seemed to have stood on the same level of friendship as the three chosen—Peter, James and John. Besides His Apostles, He befriended many, though He preferred to live amongst the simple fishermen like Peter, publicans like Levi and Zacchæus, he was delicacy itself to the Samaritan woman, to the Magdalen, and to a nameless thief undergoing the last penalty of the law on the cross.

3. A death-bed is always a solemn spectacle. And the words of one almost on the threshold of the world whose gateway is the grave ever have a solemnity of their own. Now it is under the most solemn conditions that we are unexpectedly introduced to one who became a friend of Our LORD for one brief hour cut short by a violent death.

During the years they had both trodden the soil of Palestine, how divergent had been the pathways of Our Lord and this man, who had somehow drifted into a life of lawlessness and probably of violence! Who would ever have guessed that He, the Virgin-born, would ever meet the outcast and treat him as a friend? It is an admitted proof of holiness if one can be found holy himself, yet also admittedly the friend of sinners. He seemed almost more than a friend in one way, for here on Calvary, in the sight of His nation, He was actually numbered

"among thieves," and was publicly sharing their legal punishment.

They met on Calvary. To Our Lord this hill of grief was to be lit up by one golden ray of consolation; and this consolation was to come from a condemned evildoer. The crowd all about took up the parrot cries they heard, and mocked and derided and shouted because others mocked and shouted, most of them "not knowing what they did" or why they did it. The mob had it all its own way. All took up the same cries; no one had a word to say in his defence. No one, that is, of any consequence. At first, even the two who were sharing His death penalty were not too overcome by their own sufferings to join in the general outcry against Him. At first both, but later "only one of those robbers who were hanged blasphemed Him." One continued to revile, but not the other; one blasphemed, the other prayed. What a strange development! Both had led the same kind of life up to this very hour. Both had the same opportunities now. Yet of these opportunities they make the most diametrically opposite use. The same scene was before the eyes of both; both heard the same wild shouting. The one was self-centred, meanly self-centred. "Save Thyself and us," a sentence in which the "us" outweighed "thyself." The selfish expressions fell unheeded on the ear of the great sufferer. But they were not unheeded by the other thief. He had been looking on; he had

been listening; he had come to form his own conclusions; he alone of all that vast crowd lifted up his voice manfully in defence of his innocent fellow sufferer. How curiously mingled are the springs of action in the human heart! Who could have thought to find any faith hidden away somewhere in the deep heart of a rough, convicted malefactor?

4. It was faith bold and manly; faith full of courageous conviction; a faith that openly espoused the lost cause of his fellow-convict. This nameless man's hand had been lifted against mankind for years, yet in the dim background of his soul there lurked a lingering respect for God. "Neither dost thou fear God," he said to his companion in his sins and in his well-merited punishment. Evidently there was good in this man, overlaid as it was by much evil. Perhaps Calvary was his first chance. Unlike Judas, to whom so much in the way of opportunity had been offered only to be indifferently thrown aside and wasted, the first ray of light which seems to have dawned on this man soon dissipated the mist of sin-dimmed darkness which had made night for so long in his neglected soul. He saw the disorder of his past, and he had the courage to be his own accuser. Before that crowd on Calvary he proclaimed his new-born reverence for God. All his life he had spent his days ignoring the commandments of God, yet on his death-bed he upholds the right of God to reverence. The

crowd had no hesitation in their condemnation of this man, and most probably we should have been equally prompt had we been present. And we should have been so far right. But the all-seeing eye of God that penetrates to the divisions of the soul has another vision. God finds a real appreciation of Himself at last in one who had led a whole life of flat rebellion to His laws. We may pass judgment on the actions of men ; often we must ; but who save God Himself can pass just judgment on the heart of man?

5. This man followed his profession of faith with logical consistency. He admits that his misspent life now meets with its just reward. "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." Here was real conversion. Here was real turning away from evil and following what was good. To the outward eye he was still the same man ; to the eye of God he was quite another being, loving now what he had despised formerly, hating now what before he had sought. The whole man changes with the change of heart.

Confession of sin is the first evidence of change of heart. The Magdalen with the changed heart came weeping quietly, her unrestrained tears telling the substance of her confession. Tears are woman's way. The man spoke out before the crowd: "I am justly punished." What unsuspected depth and nobility of character in this man! Surely, though

he had been a malefactor, as long as we respect real faith, the frank confession of personal evil-doing, open championship of the lost but better cause, fearlessness in opposing the wrong-headed multitude: so long this unknown hanging on his cross will merit our respect for the real virtues which so tardily broke through the encrustation of evil which lay so heavily on his past. "And we indeed justly." He appreciates the justice with which God seeks for compensation. For compensation is a thing that our offended God looks for, waits for, and accepts as our contribution towards the blotting out of sin.

6. The thief who now has the heart of a Christian asks for no temporal relief. He has accepted his just punishment; he does not ask for any remission; he does not ask for any alleviation; he asks for nothing that this world can provide. Whereas the unrepentant malefactor asks only to be saved from "the just reward of his deeds." Such a contrast now to his fellow, he who prays such a simple, direct, trustful, submissive prayer full of faith in the supernatural. "Lord, remember me." How was it that when the high priests and Scribes and Pharisees stood below and reviled the victim on the cross, with words so unsuited to men of their rank and education, the criminal proclaims his faith in the Messianic personality of the victim so reviled? "Lord, remember me." This malefactor was presumably a Jew,

and would not have given the title of "Lord" to one who was in his estimation less than divine. He shows that he has a firm grasp of the truth of the world to come, that other world, that world beyond the grave. "Remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom." "Thy kingdom." He knew it was not of this world, for he saw well enough that both he himself and the LORD to whom he appealed would, in not so many minutes, have finished with this visible world. There was nothing regal about that bloodstained figure, nailed to its cross ; it needed God-given faith to discern the royalty of divinity then hidden beneath that bruised and lacerated human form. But he did see, he did realize, and hence the perfection of his heartfelt, humble prayer, and its immediate and bountiful acceptance.

If this man publicly avows his belief and trust in the Crucified, no less does the Crucified publicly accept his homage and his trust. In all that assemblage was there another besides the Crucified who would publicly speak words of friendship and comfort to that criminal? In private, perhaps, safely away from a jeering mob, a man here and there might be found to speak a kindly word to him, but in public before such a public—no!

7. CHRIST on the cross did speak to him. He, at any rate, knew all. Knowing all, both the evil that men had seen and the good now hidden from their careless gaze, He does not

hesitate to accept and augment that suppliant appeal. "Remember me." For how many years had He been thinking of this man, waiting for this moment in both their lives? And now, how gladly does He work a miracle greater far than that of Cana of Galilee! Does this thief's conversion seem sudden? Yet not more suddenly was water converted into wine, and we are told that that wine was "exceeding good." A change if as sudden, yet was it no less complete. As was His wont, He prefaced His most solemn granting of the modest request with the expression He reserved for His most impressive pronouncements. "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." What was it that Our Lord had once said about good measure, pressed down and running over? Here you have good measure given by Himself. He is asked with conscious humility for a remembrance only, and that at some future indefinite time. He gives how very much more, and at once! "This day thou shalt be with Me." Only He who then spoke knows what that companionship could mean. How can we express in human words what must be the ecstatic delight of God's own companionship? In the lives of some Saints we read their halting attempts at explaining the ecstasy of soul which floods their whole being with an almost overpowering expansion of purest joy, a living beatitude which seems to penetrate and entirely enfold them as in a spiritualized contact

with the Divine. A beatitude not of this world, and not to be expressed in human language. It is as much beyond human ken as the uttermost limits of the universe. All this inexpressible and living joy is promised to the thief, when this same day on Calvary shall be ended. He had climbed that hill an outcast, friendless and scorned; he was fastened to his cross with a general verdict of "Serve him right!" yet on this very same day he meets his LORD and is to be securely transferred into GOD's own Kingdom. He climbed the hill a man with a sorry past; still, on his cross he is taken to the heart of the GOD who made him, openly, before the world. Is there anything capricious in this sudden declaration of Our LORD's? No. This man did in a short time what GOD desires most of us to do in the course of many years. It is things that GOD wants, not time. What are the things GOD wants? Innocence He wants, of course, Nathanaels without guile. But there are not many of these. Even Our LORD found but few Nathanaels. But He found Peter, and Levi, and Zacchæus, and Magdalen, and this nameless man on his cross. In the past, how some had stained the robe of their first innocence! Yet something can be done to cleanse these stains, something that He is willing to contribute to our small share. Calvary speaks of His contribution, which was more than His acceptance of a painful death. Before that consummation of His work for man, there comes this lesson taught

by this public change in the inward and outward bearing of the thief. Men may individually learn from books, but mankind learns more easily when it learns from men. This man seemed to have led a wilful and a useless life. Useless it was, up to a certain point. That point was reached when he came to know JESUS, and Him crucified. Then his lifetime teaches that GOD, but only GOD, knows how to educe good out of evil; his lifetime, with its evil beginning and good end, teaches aloud; it is a drama in action proclaiming a saving dogma. "With GOD nothing is impossible."

8. There comes a time in the lives of many when the fascination of sensuality in its very subtle forms loses its witchery. The fires lit by inexperienced youth begin to burn low; they smoulder languidly, and when the rain from heaven falls they are extinguished. For a time they may smoulder, but the leaping flame is gone; a dull glow may linger feebly among the fading embers, till they grow cold. The fire is gone, but the ashes remain; a melancholy reminder of the fire that once raged and consumed. When the fire can no longer burn, yet can the ashes blacken. Ashes are light, and falling lightly, they spread a film which dims, but does not stain. It needs but a summer's breeze, and the dusty ashes are blown apart and the smooth surface they covered is bright again.

Some think it a duty religiously to preserve the ashes of the past. They will not let the

mirror reflect the bright light of heaven, but with mistaken zeal they spread their dust thickly upon the mirror, and with their own hand obstruct the cheerful sunshine. Then they complain of the gloom!

This malefactor had a past. Not only Our Lord, but all the world knew it. Because the world knew it, it crucified him, and in this instance quite justly. Our Lord also knew it, knew the past and knew also the present, and, knowing both, He said, "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." The man is accepted for what he is *now*. The memory of what he *had been* once does not prevent his being called to share the joy of his Lord.

9. Many lessons are mutely taught us by this lowly outcast of whom Christ made a friend when they were both crucified. But no lesson is more valuable than this, that God instantly receives the change of heart. "A contrite and a humble heart He never despises." This is amongst the doctrines proclaimed from Calvary. The last scene of His life sums up the effect of his ministry on earth. That effect is not a prolonged remembrance of what His friends had been, but the final result of all their combined experiences, follies, failings, and final repentance. It is not that He has no appreciation of beginnings. Of course He has; but we stand or fall by final results. The war is not decided by the way it begins, but by the way it ends. The prodigal was not lost, though he did go astray

out of sight away in a far country ; he came back, and the story of his wilful wandering was forgotten in the joy of his ragged homecoming.

The same parable is set before us in the person of the malefactor, who strayed possibly even further than the prodigal, yet met with a welcome no less tender, with no less plain ignoring of a stained past, when he wholeheartedly turned to his LORD, and, asking for so little, received so much.

If change of heart could win the friendship of CHRIST for such a lost fragment of humanity as this robber, who should not take heart of grace? Only those who, like the other thief, remain what they are, without faith or humility or manly submission to the evil they have brought on themselves, who will not rise to the opportunities offered but never forced on them.

Sin is indeed a great evil ; it is the attempt to thwart the will of the OMNIPOTENT. A sinful life is a great evil ; yet out of the sinful life of this man concerning whom we know so little beyond the fact that he had been a justly condemned criminal, GOD fashioned for Himself a Saint. The crucifixion of CHRIST on Calvary was a sin, the sin of a whole nation, yet out of that very sin on Calvary the providence of GOD has furnished forth the means of salvation for all nations and for all time.

"Qui Mariam absolvisti
Et Latronem exaudisti
Mihi quoque spem dedisti."

MEDITATION IX

GENNESARET AND PEACE

JOHN XXI. 4-22

"When the morning was come, JESUS stood on the shore, yet the disciples knew not that it was JESUS. JESUS therefore said to them: Children, have you any meat? They answered Him: No. He saith to them: Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and you shall find. They cast therefore; and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. That disciple therefore whom JESUS loved, said to Peter: It is the LORD. Simon Peter, when he heard that it was the LORD, girt his coat about him (for he was naked), and cast himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the ship (for they were not far from the land), but as it were two hundred cubits, dragging the net with fishes, and as soon as they came to land, they saw hot coals lying, and a fish laid thereon, and bread. JESUS saith to them: Bring hither of the fishes which you have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land, full of great fishes, one hundred and fifty-three. And although there were so many the net was not broken. JESUS saith to them: Come, and dine. And

none of them who were at meat durst ask Him Who art Thou? knowing that it was the LORD. And JESUS cometh and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish in like manner. This is now the third time that JESUS was manifested to His disciples, after he had risen from the dead. When therefore they had dined, JESUS saith to Simon Peter, Simon son of John, lovest thou me more than these? He saith to Him: Yea, LORD, Thou knowest that I love Thee? He saith to him: Feed my lambs. He saith to him again: Simon son of John, lovest thou Me? He saith to Him: Yea, LORD, Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith to him: Feed my lambs. He said to him the third time: Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved, because He had said to him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said to Him, LORD, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee. He said to him: Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to thee, when thou wast younger thou didst gird thyself and didst walk where thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee and lead thee whither thou wouldst not. And this He said, signifying by what death He should glorify GOD. And when He had said this, He saith to him: Follow Me. Peter turning about, saw that disciple whom JESUS loved following, who also leaned on His breast at supper and said LORD, who is he that shall betray Thee?

Him therefore when Peter had seen, he saith to JESUS: LORD, and what shall this man do? JESUS saith to him: So I will have him to remain till I come, what is it to thee? Follow thou Me."

THERE is a question which every Christian must ask himself: How does CHRIST treat those of His followers who sin against Him, and afterwards repent?

A difficulty comes partly from this, that we feel that we cannot generalize too much. It is true that we read of CHRIST'S conduct in cases which seem similar to some which may intimately concern us; but, after all, are they quite similar? It may be argued, how can we be quite sure that CHRIST would treat one case precisely in the way in which we read that He treated a case alike to all appearance? If the cases seem alike, still He may have been dealing with individuals quite unlike. This is a reasonable difficulty, we must not be presumptuous nor yet suppose our case isolated.

Up to a certain point there is an undercurrent of truth in these difficulties; they are specious, and yet in many instances but half-truths. Half-truths are more objectionable than whole falsehoods; a whole falsehood can be isolated, it can be made to stand out by itself, without any shelter, so that we can see plainly all round it; but the half-truth puts its undeniable side foremost; that at any rate cannot be denied; the hidden circumstances which

modify the whole position are kept out of sight, or refused their full value, often enough from mistaken humility.

2. A general question can only have an answer equally general. Still, we have no example which shows us CHRIST discouraging those who come to Him honestly. All the disciples fled from Him in the garden; all were afraid to acknowledge Him; Peter, most of all, took a prominent part in this abandonment of CHRIST. Yet all were gently and generously pardoned. Concerning this sin in which they all participated we must not forget that the sin of these timid disciples was committed under exceptional circumstances, still, it was exceptionally grave. Also it was not repeated, and it is the repetition of sins that causes the greatest difficulties.

Now the treatment meted out to an exceptionally grave sin is set before us, no doubt to help our desponding hearts which have to account for things, usually speaking, not so grave.

St Paul, addressing mankind at large and in a general way, says, "Let no temptation take hold of you, but such as is human." (1 Cor. x. 13.) That sin of the disciples can hardly be classed as human, and so we may argue that it was all the more difficult to obtain pardon and remission. If then this is atoned for and generously pardoned, then we may be heartened concerning the misdeeds alluded to by St Paul.

And these form the majority of our causes for regrets.

Another point not to be lost sight of is the clear distinction to be drawn between a passing momentary sinful act, and the determined will to cling to a favourite failing. The disciples, under stress of great fear, gave way for the moment, but they recovered and did not repeat the sin. So we see that isolated sins may meet with easy remission, comparatively; but there still remains a sinking of the heart at the thought of sins not quite so isolated. There is some comfort in the thought that these more frequent falls are not usually of a grave nature, and are easily classed under St Paul's heading of "human." Grave as these are, they do not come from a settled determination of the heart and will.

3. Now let us think over the doings at Gennesaret. Not many weeks separate the happenings at Gethsemane from those at the Lake of Galilee. But to the disciples, the whole aspect of earth and Heaven had changed in that interval. They were waiting for promised developments, and though for the moment they followed their usual avocations, all the time they felt they were not "of them." They had no inkling of what was in store for them on the morrow of the night which they had spent in such unfruitful toil, fishing in vain through the dark hours.

When the morning broke at length and the

mists and shadows slowly cleared away, the rising mist revealed a solitary figure standing on the lake shore, and gazing at them. But such a figure meant nothing to them, and they hardly heeded it. They soon came to know how much it did mean.

4. Why was He there, alone, silent, watchful over them unseen, as He stood on the firm sandy shore? Had He been watching over them all those weary hours of unprofitable toil? He is the watcher even now, this is His care, unseen to watch the labours of His disciples, caring for them with minute care, while He Himself is out of sight, so that our thoughts even do not advert to His presence. We may forget, but He, "He shall neither slumber nor sleep that keepeth Israel." (Ps. cxx. 4.) All the while His thoughts are with His own, as they were at this early dawn, with His wearied disciples, toiling in the fishing bark before Him. To them it had seemed useless toil; but toil is seldom useless, though its fruit may be of a kind undreamed of by the dispirited toilers.

He knew the state of affairs, yet He asks for information: "Children, have you anything to eat?" He asks, and they answered with a weary and laconic "No." They were certainly surprised when the Stranger volunteered His advice; at one time they would have scorned His recommendation; who was He, to tell them where a net should be cast? Had they

not fished those waters ever since they were boys? Did He think He could teach them? and besides, had they not just fished all the likely places? Why should they begin all their toil over again at the bidding of an unknown? All quite reasonable objections, and all in this case quite wrong. But the events, now only a few weeks old, had taught them some humility; some good had already come out of what had been evil. They thought a little less of themselves, and now were ready to do the bidding of another who seemed to take a friendly interest in them, rather than follow their own inclination just because it was their own. Had the Stranger on the shore wanted to find some proof that a lesson had been taken to heart? If so, He took the right way to find out, and the result was satisfactory. In simple compliance with the friendly Stranger's advice, they once more cast their empty net, and found that they could hardly draw it back, so weighty was it with its burden. Yet great as the strain was, the net did not break.

We are willing enough to grant that Our Lord taught general lessons, but we are slow in our applications of them, especially in our own case; we rebel against toiling through the gloomy nights while He sees whether we have assimilated His lesson or not. He knows well enough, but He will have our word too. Just as He knows our daily wants, but would have us make them known, and ask in daily prayer,

"Give us this day our daily bread." We must do something, and not leave everything to Him, and surely asking and following directions are easy enough as tests of our good will and sincerity.

5. And who were these men over whom CHRIST watched; to whom He spoke so kindly; to whom He gave such abundant success, when at His word they did so prosperously what they had previously attempted in vain for so many weary hours? These were the men who had fled away from Him a few weeks ago; men who then had thought only of their own safety; men who for three eventful years had shared all His multiplied benefits, and who in time of danger had left Him to go alone and friendless to His death. Had they already made amends for this baseness? We may be sure that they had, for this was not the first, but the third time they had seen Him since the morning of the Resurrection (v. 14). Here is a scene of entire forgiveness, with no reproach, no word or action to recall the infidelity so recent. Whatever reparation they may have made is kept in kind obscurity, and the Evangelists are not permitted to enlarge upon faults so amply compensated for in after life.

Who could He be who watched them from the shore, who could fill their empty net at a word? St John's instinct prompted his exclamation to St Peter: "It is the LORD!"

in the light of much after history we also can see that it must have been the LORD; simple as the explanation seems to us now, it evidently had not occurred to the preoccupied mind of Peter. But the exclamation woke up all his deep affection towards the LORD he really loved with all a man's strength and devotedness. It was not enough to see, Peter must be close to Him, and without more thought the disciple flung himself impetuously into the water and swam quickly ashore. But the calmer beloved disciple remained in the boat, watching the scene, and with almost unconscious sailorman's instinct measures with his eye the distance to be crossed by the swimmer, "as it were two hundred cubits." A natural remark for a fisherman to make, but it would not have occurred to a mere landsman; at such a time only long habit would have made the remark both natural and spontaneous.

6. They landed in silence, and drew in the net and then saw further evidence of His care for them. There was a fire already lit, and a fish broiling and a supply of bread. What homely details; and how simple it all is, and how kind! What a contrast to Gethsemane! They could not watch that night, not even for one hour; but He . . . He had watched and taken thought for them, and in some sense laboured for them, and though He had a message of supreme importance to communicate, He first sees that the tired and

hungry toilers are fed, and fed by Himself, and after that, His message will be given. To make them still more at their ease, He bids them bring some of their own catch and add it to the supply He had already provided.

All simple and kindly actions, but consider who did them! Is there not revelation of character? A revelation of tact, delicacy, appropriate help, admirably suited to the needs and customs of those for whom He ministered. Greater display would have overawed them, so display is avoided ; a word of reminder might have chilled them, so no word is spoken ; so too, if everything had been done for them they might have felt like uneasy guests at a great man's table ; so the produce of their own fishing is also contributed to the meal. All simple and quiet and natural ; yet they were awed; no one durst say a word, or ask a question, the question indeed was not necessary, for they all knew instinctively that "it was the LORD" (v. 12). It was indeed the LORD manifesting Himself, making Himself known as He is, and as He is towards those who, once upon a time, had failed Him, but had retrieved their position with Him. Such was the Prodigal who came back ragged and mud stained, faint with fear and just apprehension as to his reception, and found such a warm welcome in the old home he had so lightly abandoned.

7. Scenes are more widely intelligible than words ; here is a scene that all men can under-

stand. Explanations and protestations are not so convincing as the simplest deeds of thoughtful kindness, done in silence, and left to speak for themselves. They speak to those who care to listen with no less unmistakable clearness now, than they did to the disciples who sat by Him on the lake shore and ate their simple fare in the sunny dawn of that memorable morning.

If we lay stress on a scene like this, it is because it is more than a scene ; it is a revelation spoken in the universal language of action, testifying outwardly to the unseen love which CHRIST had—and has—for His penitent followers. You can see here what He was and what He still is, for "JESUS CHRIST yesterday and to-day and for ever." (Heb. xiii. 8.)

There was another little symbolical circumstance also worthy of note. Although the net was so heavily weighted "the net was not broken." We may take this as symbolizing and foreshadowing so many things which naturally ought to happen, and yet they do not happen ; how often during the passing centuries did it not seem that the Church ought to crumble to pieces under the weight placed upon her by hostile hands, the weight of persecution, calumny, unjust laws, and blind prejudice, but the Church does not fall into ruin. The mustard seed grown into a tree is shorn of some outward ornament, but it lives on, bearing leaf and flower and fruit in season. Peter's net cast into the water at the bidding of

CHRIST holds its catch, and fragile though it seems to be, and is, yet is not broken.

8. They finished the morning meal, and then it seems that CHRIST went apart with His chief Apostle ; walking along the shore beside the gently rippling waters. The risen mists had disclosed the placid surface of the lake, the distant hills showed in the softened morning light, the villages were too distant for more than the faint hum of awakening life to break in upon the stillness all around. A sunlit scene of tranquillity and peace, the morning breeze still cool and refreshing, fitfully ruffling the leaves with a pleasant rustling, what a contrast to their last walk by night to Gethsemane! Perhaps that scene was in Peter's mind, and he recalled his impetuous declaration so soon falsified. Perhaps the question now put to him by CHRIST seemed to grow out of his own thought, and he was hardly surprised at the sound of the well-known voice which sounded in his ears. But he was surprised at what was said. "Simon, son of John." Yes, that was his name, that was all he was, the son of his father, and no better man ; his other name, given him by that same voice now speaking, justly had he forfeited any claim to that. He was just Simon son of John, nothing more now. But the voice went on, recalling explicitly to his memory that other scene, and his rash boastfulness. "Lovest thou Me more than these?" A trying question, yet he could meet

it now, and trying as it was, while it questioned the degree, it did not question the fact of his love, that it seemed to take for granted. There was comfort in that. The question being framed as to the quality of his love, he would make no profession of pre-eminence, but with a touch of the sadness he was feeling, in his voice, he said with simple directness, "Yea, LORD, thou knowest that I love Thee." Of course He knew it, but He would have Peter's answer before he publicly brought out the first robe, and again clothing him officially with it, as He did in the words "Feed My lambs," thereby reinstating his once fallen Apostle in the rank always intended to be his. No word of recrimination, no dwelling on the bitter memory, nothing to tarnish the perfect generosity of the reinstatement, and the trust restored. "Feed my lambs." This was said to the very man who, with rough language, had denied that he even "knew the Man." How can CHRIST Himself give more convincing proof of the perfect nature of the pardon He extends to repentance and to loving efforts at reparation?

9. Atonement and Reparation. This is the outcome of sin for which Our LORD looks; not Degradation and Death. "I will not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live." Death and destruction form no part of His mission; it is conversion and life that He wants. In the outset of His public career

"He called the twelve and began to send them two and two . . . and going forth they preached that men should do penance." (Mk. vi. 7-12.) Now the doing of penance is the making reparation, the voluntary offering of compensation. The GOD of law and order cannot allow His commands to be broken, and weakly pass over such guilt and take no notice. But the compensation compared with the offence is small and easily made. The offering is mostly in the heart, but evidenced by some outward testimony, confession, contrition and amendment. Here by the lake side CHRIST will spare His evidently sorrowing Apostle as much as possible, but some compensation He must have, and He exacts it gently enough. Peter's answer was sincere, and CHRIST accepted it, yet puts almost the same question and receives the same answer a second time. Is not that enough? No, for it must be made clear that CHRIST is not merely asking a question, but asking a question with an ulterior purpose, He must ask yet a third time. "Peter was grieved, because He had said to him the third time, Lovest thou Me. And he said to Him: LORD, thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee" (v. 17). This time Peter is not left in any uncertainty as to the completeness of his pardon and his restoration to favour. This is evidenced not by word alone, but by the work now definitely entrusted to his charge, "Feed my sheep."

10. Speaking of Himself CHRIST had said

"I am the good Shepherd who giveth His life for His sheep." His sheep must be very dear to the shepherd who will lay down his life for them, and not to every one would he entrust his own flock. It is for the sheep that He cares for, as well as for Peter, chief Shepherd, that CHRIST speaks, and having, so to speak, given back the first robe, He now puts the ring of supreme authority on the finger of one who has passed through the fire of trial, not unscathed himself, that his own humiliation may teach him to have and to show CHRIST'S own gentle forbearance and patience with the weak and the stricken, for whom He desires, not extermination, but life and health.

Peter's reparation might appear too brief and too simple. But all was not exacted as they walked and talked by the waters of Gennesaret. Peter had yet many years of life and work before him ; compensation would be woven into the fabric of those coming years also. Just as it is done for us. We have moments of keenly felt sorrow, but moments pass, while the sorrow, losing something of its first keenness, runs like a thread through the texture of subsequent life, not obtrusive, but there.

11. And now that he is fully restored to grace, shall Peter's career be shaped smoothly for him? What shall accompany the priceless gift of forgiveness? As evidence of pardon, he is given authority, such authority as men may envy. But CHRIST'S gifts, like his own life, are

stamped with the indelible sign of the cross. For CHRIST Himself the valleys were not filled up, nor the rough ways made level. Neither shall they be for Peter. "Amen, amen, I say to thee, when thou wast younger thou didst gird thyself and didst walk where thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and lead thee whither thou wouldst not."

"Not as the world giveth do I give unto you," are not these words plain enough? Yet many Christians will not accept them. They want more than Peter's reward; they want purple and fine linen and sumptuous daily fare as well. But these were not for Peter; they were not provided for CHRIST; and it is no part of His scheme to supply overflowing worldly abundance for His followers. The fare which He sets before them is simple, plain, ordinary, but sufficient, as was the frugal meal of freshly caught fish and bread which He and Peter had shared that morning.

12. This last chapter of St John's Gospel seems very full of the sayings and doings of St Peter, and yet the Evangelist tells us that his object in writing is this, "These are written that you may believe that JESUS is the CHRIST, the SON of GOD." (XXX. 31.) Then why go into so much detail about Peter?

The answer is, can you bring out the character of CHRIST better than by narrating His dealings with those about Him, for a man

reveals himself in his sayings and doings, especially towards those who love or hate him ; to those who are faithful, or who fall away. What would have been the average man's treatment of one, who had been cherished, made much of, singled out for honour beyond his fellows, and in return for all this favour, declares with an oath, that he never knew his benefactor? The hearts of most men would have been stung too deeply for forgiveness, still less for oblivion. Certainly the human heart of CHRIST could be stung, as when He allowed Himself to be prompted to exclaim, "What! could you not watch one hour with Me?" The scene at Gethsemane is needed for the complete understanding of the scene by the Lake of Gennesaret. With the two, the revelation is complete, it is not the revelation of a perfect man, it is beyond that ; it is and can be, only the revelation of the GOD made Man, the Word made flesh.

13. And is CHRIST'S pardon quite unconditional? No, not entirely. For having forgiven and reinstated His humbled disciple He adds a word, "Follow Me." Was this a command, or was it an invitation? It seemed a solemn word at a solemn moment, not a moment when we should expect Peter's attention to be completely drawn away by a distraction. Yet at the sight of St John, Peter's thoughts flew off into a new channel. Peter knew now what his own fate was to be, but what was going

to happen to this disciple who was following them at some little distance? "Him therefore when Peter had seen, he saith to JESUS: LORD, what shall this man do?" It was so very natural, yet we feel it is so out of keeping with the tone of reverent solemnity pervading this whole episode, that we feel its truth; no inventiveness would have imagined anything so incongruous. But it is in keeping with the impulsive character of one whose words followed so rapidly on his impulsive thoughts. So natural, and so reprehensively inquisitive, so deserving of CHRIST'S brief retort, "What is it to thee?"

Another man's career, what is it to us? It is enough for us to know that CHRIST is taking care of him also, and taking care in His own way. "So I will have him to remain till I come, what is it to thee?" He gives a sufficient answer while administering His rebuke; subtly mingling compliance with His reproof. It was not all reproof, for He repeats His word of invitation to Peter himself, "Follow thou Me."

These are the last recorded words of CHRIST in this last of the four gospels. Could a record of His career end more appropriately? Had He not come to be to us the Way, as well as to be the Life? The way our foot is to tread; the life which stirs within us to nerve us to tread that way, pictured in the New Testament narratives often enough in parables, that many may read and yet not understand. But how many passages in His career yield up lessons and examples

full of deep meaning and encouragement, if only we will trouble patiently to dig deep enough!

Follow me! Once said to Peter at Gennesaret said daily to every Christian. But how and when, and where? How, He Himself tells us, "If any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross." When? When must we take up this cross on our own shoulders? Again we have His answer, "Daily." And where? Where is the pathway we are to tread? There are two, the way of the Commandments, as to which we have no choice if we would enter into life eternal. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." (Matt. xix. 17.) This is essential. But there is a further choice: "If thou wilt be perfect . . . sell what thou hast . . . and come and follow Me."

Is this what CHRIST meant when He spoke those words to Peter? Would He have been satisfied if Peter had just kept within the rigid law? Judging by his subsequent life, we may conclude that Peter understood Him to mean more. For Peter did leave all things as CHRIST had once suggested to the young man asking what was beyond the keeping of the Commandments. "If thou wilt be perfect?" Would anything less have satisfied Peter's love for his LORD. True, the words are not imperative, "If thou wilt." But how many have been willing, and would Peter have been less willing than these? Invitation, though it was in form, to him it was a sacred expression of his Master's

wish. It was to him more than a simple instruction, and joyfully did he accept it, sharing his Master's life of trial, sharing even the manner of His death. This was "following." For Peter was not enjoined to think out and plan and contrive a new way of life for himself or for men, one which would be framed according to his own independent and perhaps changing interpretation, of traditions and sacred writings. He was to lead, but only to lead those who, like himself, were following CHRIST.

Now we have thought over some incidents in CHRIST's journey through life. We have seen Him under various aspects, seen Him dealing with the poor, the afflicted, the outcast, the everyday sinner; we have listened to many of His undying words; "words are spirit and life," words that translate to us the inmost feelings of the heart of the Word made Flesh. They are words that will never pass away, even though we pass them by, and take no heed of them. And His actions? Has He not the right to say, "If I had not done among men what no other man hath done"?

If some of these words and events have found their way into our heart, we must come to some conclusion. What shall that conclusion be? What would CHRIST wish it to be? All CHRIST's wishes for us are summed up in His very last recorded words, when walking by the waters of Gennesaret he said to Peter, and in his person to us all

Follow Me!

INSTRUCTION III

RELIGIOUS PERFECTION

RELIGIOUS perfection is a subject which may well interest others besides those who pass their lives in a religious order. Religious orders are recruited from those outside, and others besides actual recruits may care to know what is to be the aim of those entering or already living in such orders.

Perfection in any subject seems an arduous undertaking, there must be a good deal to be said about it, and obviously all cannot be said at once. It is but one word, this word "Perfection," but it has many meanings and branches out into many pathways ; not all of them can be trodden at the same time nor by the same feet.

At the outset of this instruction this preliminary should be borne in mind. Whatever "religious perfection" may mean, and whatever definition of it may be given, it is a voluntary pursuit. Also among Catholics it is a technical term, denoting, not the Christian perfectness of ordinary Christian men and women, but the definite kind of perfection, suggested by Our LORD'S own words in answer to one who asked for a perfection beyond what is attained by the observance of the letter of the Ten Commandments. This observance is

sufficient for the winning of eternal life, but, said Our LORD, "*If* thou wilt be perfect. . . ." (Matt. xix. 21.) A very different formula this, couched in language very dissimilar to the messages of the prophets of old who prefaced their words of command with the striking foreword, "Thus sayeth the LORD." Of old, the LORD spoke but to command: here a suggestion is made; we are instructed, but we are left quite free to take or to leave alone, just as individual prepossessions may incline us. The choice is free, yet once made, there should be no turning back; hence the choice should not be hurried or inconsiderate; but made with knowledge such as that of the sons of Zebedee when they were warned and still affirmed their readiness "to drink of the Master's own chalice." (Matt. xx. 22.) The choice is free, but it is also definite and final. Almost as final as matrimony, but not quite. A choice of this kind necessarily supposes stability, hence it is rightly inferred that religious perfection is a "state of life," not a passing phase of it, just as matrimony is a permanent condition, and not an ephemeral incident in life.

It is a state of life which includes within itself its own ideal of perfection. The remarks made here are restricted to that special type of perfection which is the common aim of all the men and women who live by rule in the religious orders. A distinct type which comes naturally to be termed "religious perfection,"

as it is the sort of perfection to be aimed at by such "religious" as an object capable of attainment by all well disposed members of the orders.

Perfection being of various types, it is easy to confuse the varieties, and it is as disastrous as easy; it is not too much to say "disastrous" for it really is a disaster when anyone aims long and laboriously at the wrong target, for he only reaps failure if his aim succeed.

This perfection may also seem a process of betterment. Certainly in the spiritual life there is a kind of betterment whereby prayers, meditations, virtues generally are more easily and faultlessly exercised each succeeding day. The proper name of this ever ascending type is "ascetical perfection." But the type is rare, quite beyond the reach of ordinary mortals, even beyond the reach of most of those deservedly reckoned amongst the Saints. It is a rare privilege, not conceded to many, and being a privilege it may be the subject of holy ambition. ("But be zealous for better gifts.") (1 Cor. xii. 31.) But it cannot be generally commanded or exacted of those who walk the narrower way. Now religious perfection is demanded, whence it follows that it is something comparatively easy of attainment by those who loyally follow their career. The words of Our Lord are spoken generally, "If thou wilt"; they are not confined to sex or condition, and the implication is that the object aimed at is

capable of achievement by those invited to aim.

Spiritual writers are generally agreed that there is a state which the normal religious can attain to, and as he can succeed he lies under the obligation of aiming at success. As to what constitutes this "state" there is some latitude of opinion, and freedom as well as latitude. What is here advocated is advocated as a working theory, not an exclusive one.

A religious is required to aim, but in this, as in most other affairs, absolute success may not crown the most honest effort; yet honest effort is required from all, even if complete success may not be within the grasp of every individual. The rank and file of pianists are expected to play fairly well, we don't exact that every one should be a Paderewski.

We may describe this state of perfection as involving the acquisition of the following:

1. The first point is, mastery of our passions. Not indeed final and utter mastery, but such a command that we hardly ever hesitate in quick rejection of any grave temptation concerning the vows. No human being can count on complete immunity from temptation, but unpremeditated minor errors, passing speculations, occasionally doing less well; these are part of normal human life, and orderly religious life offers no absolute guarantee against casual and sudden assaults, easily repressed, and not really checking onward progress. But

the soul has entered a region where all graver onslaughts of the Evil One are useless, because mundane allurements which form the bait of temptation have lost their attractive fascinations.

2. The next element is the substantial observance of the constitutions. Here also a qualifying word is needed. Constitutions themselves are of varying importance ; also they are capable of being observed in spirit as well as in letter. The entire observance of literally all constitutions may well be an armful too wide for every arm to embrace, but an individual may take in as much as he can, and for such, this is substantially grasping the whole. This point is important, and should check the condemnation of some who by temperament, by early upbringing, or by some other fortuitous cause, may not be able to keep step with the main body. If they fall out at odd times it is not really blameworthy in them. Our judgments should often be wisely merciful.

3. The next point which may rank is the presence of a certain amount of love and real appreciation of the state of life. Not necessarily effervescent, but rather deep seated and permanent. Indeed supposing the right understanding of what a religious vocation is to a Christian, this love must necessarily be present.

4. Besides the three points just mentioned there is a fourth, which seems to emerge naturally from the blending of the qualifica-

tions enumerated. One who has fairly mastered his wayward inclinations, who by the free exercise of his will keeps steadily to a pathway narrower even than that of the Commandments, such a man naturally begins to taste of that tranquillity of heart and peace of soul which Our Lord promised to those who followed Him really. If the promise was made to those following the comparatively broad path of the Ten Commandments, it is reasonable to suppose that this rewarding peace will be given in greater measure to those whose following is closer.

5. Here then are some results, but only some which are also indications of an actual arrival at this particular form of perfection. These are some of the materials which combine to build up this Christian edifice, but the builders may not entirely rest from labour, they may not lay down their tools and with folded arms contemplate at leisure the finished building. For it is not finished, good as it is, advanced as it may be, it is still incomplete, for the building is for eternity, and no one will have the time to put the last finishing touch. Well as we may have built, our building is still to go on, our work being to fashion after the model set before us by Christ Himself. Build as we may, we shall never equal this model, but not on that account must we relax in our effort to reproduce it with what accuracy we may. Of set purpose we may not stay our handi-

work. But here we tread on the confines of mystical theology, and can generalize no longer. At this period the foundations will have been laid; it is for the Master builder now to give His own directions, and to employ each skilled workman in such special labour as He shall see fit.

In its ordinary stages religious perfection is meant for ordinary men and women. It is quite attainable by ordinary men and women. The goodness of the average human being is compatible with the presence of some faults, of certain faults, not of all and every fault. Faults of hasty temper, some slackness in the performance of daily recurring duties, little yieldings to self ease, want of ready self-denial, these and such like shortcomings (all within the range of frailties) are not incompatible with the state of religious perfection. An individual act may be faulty, still it is a passing act, a temporary lapse, which does not break up the state, though it is no ornament to it. Of course this remark applies only and exclusively to the outcome of human weakness and frailty, not to what may result from human malice. Putting aside such malicious sins as are necessarily mortal a soul may be substantially in the state, though its precise position may be disguised at times by the mist of evident failings.

It is natural to suppose that real progress in perfection admits of being diagnosed by certain

evidences. What may we accept as valid signs of progress? First of all, not solely by unwonted feelings. Feelings of their own nature are evanescent, coming and going like alternating sunshine and shadow; feelings furnish a soil too sandy for solid building. Besides, feelings accompany states, they do not create them. Though we cannot accept feelings as a test, taken by themselves, yet as companions we may guess their nature from their company. We must say "by themselves" as some feelings are so akin yet so diverse in origin as to need nice discrimination to prove "what spirit they may be of."

Happiness in a special vocation springing partly from a sense of its value may be taken as an assured sign of advance. But better evidence is furnished by the solid fact that we fall less frequently into minor faults, that there is less inclination to give way. We have another indication of yet higher evidential value when we find that we overcome temptations with greater ease, when we can face them with more quiet self-reliance, and with less internal disturbance. Progress will also show itself in the greater frequency of spontaneous acts, little acts, not conspicuous acts, yet still acts that require the hardening of our will and the stiffening of our resolution. This is a sign that admits of no fallacy, it is absolutely real, absolutely can be relied upon. Where there are these deeds of internal mastery, not always

visible to the external observer, there almost always come, partly as a reward, partly as a natural result, quiet but strangely strong attractions to the things that make up the inward life. Deeper devotion is felt at Holy Communion, more concentration without fatigue, less disturbing currents of distracting thoughts when at prayer; when visiting the Blessed Sacrament a more intimate if inexplicable realization or conviction as to the truths of faith; a dawning sense of the comparative triviality of mundane aims and objects; none of these experiences at first very penetrating or long-lived. But their tendency is to overshadow, gradually, earlier and less spiritual conceptions and aspects of much that happens all about us. These experiences show that the old life is receding, growing dim, and insensibly giving place and merging into the new; that the old Adam is fading away, and that the new is gradually growing into his place. This gradual growth, if real, manifests itself in greater inward and outward patience, greater gentleness, more sweetness in putting up with contradictions and disappointments, in quiet endurance of the unforeseen accidents of life which so often come at the most inconvenient moments; in combination all these form a convincing sign; one proving that mastery is well nigh acquired, for the Master is ruling His internal kingdom with such rare outbreaks of rebellion that His realm is at peace.

This practically is religious perfection ; an end to be reached it is true, yet also a starting point for other journeys into the mystic land of prayer, which stretches beyond our ken, a land which not all are invited to explore. As a journey's end, it is quite within the reach of all who are well disposed, and given good will and average length of days, most religious do attain to this harbour which their rules set before them. What may subsequently happen to the frail barks which have come safely through many perils to this haven is beyond the range of written laws and so form no part of that perfection which may be reached by the faithful observance of wisely drawn up constitutions. Most, if not all, do attain to this perfection which is the objective of positive legislation. If they go no further, they have not missed anything that is essential to their profession, and who can know why God invites some but not others to ascend still higher? We must not blame those not honoured with this invitation, nor ignorantly judge all and sundry by impossible standards. With all submission we may all aim at the higher states, and do our best to deserve what will not be due in justice to our effort, but is entirely at the free disposal of the Giver of all good gifts who allots one, or three, or five talents as it seems good to Him. But the single denarius for which we covenanted is ours to earn, and when earned, will infallibly be given. Religious perfection

then is within the grasp of all who will work for it. It is given as wages, not as a Christmas gift.

How must we work?

We must have a definite standard before us and steadily live up to that. What others may or may not do is no immediate affair of ours. We have to keep our standard not another's. We have to practise being exact in our small way of life. So many of the things we have to do are small and seem trivial. In themselves perhaps they really are trivial ; but their importance does not come from the things themselves. They are important because they force us to do *that* thing, and not another. Left to our own inclination we should do the other thing. The importance of not doing it is shown in the practical training it gives for the prompt action of the will, thus made to act against inclination. When the will has been sufficiently practised in doing small duties readily, it is trained for greater ; but it would have been inept and waste of time to have made experimental beginnings with what was really important. So by the daily performance of trivial daily duties we are insensibly training and forming ourselves anew, we are being gradually re-made according to a higher model. There will be occasional difficulties of course, but they won't retard us much. On the contrary, if there is no irresolute brooding over each inconvenience as it arises they will soon disappear.

"Who shall roll us away the stone?" said the holy women on the first Easter morn. They did not sit down by the wayside to await the coming of some one casually passing by, who might give them help in a task evidently beyond their strength. They went on walking quietly, and when they reached their destination they found the stone already removed. Here you have the history of many of life's apparent difficulties. They loom large as we gaze at them from afar ; some actually are large ; and yet when we have plodded our way up to them we find they have somehow vanished untouched by even a finger of ours.

This being only a little instruction, and not a treatise, may well end here. But one remark may be added. What has been said, though primarily said of the Virtue of religious perfection, yet with some necessary modification, is equally true for the attainment of any Christian virtue.

L. D. S.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, GLASGOW.

246.72
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3449

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